SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

A MINISTRY OF THE PAULIST FATHERS

Wherever you are on your faith journey,
you are welcome here.

ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT

Insights from Our Synodal Process



2022 - 2023

Los Angeles, CA



FOREWORD FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ -

I am so excited to hand on the report on the Synod listening sessions in which many of you participated. Deep gratitude is owed to our Synod Team who culled the responses and developed this report on the Synod.

Developing and hosting the listening sessions in-person and online reflected the purpose of the process:

"To hold a "synod" means to walk together. I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have: to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together with their Lord who walks among us! We are not alone; we do not walk alone. We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together."

-Pope Francis, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, 4 October 2013

Varied experiences and observations about our Church and our faith are reflected in this report. But, this is more than a report — it is the story of our community, how we see ourselves and where we are going. Unfortunately, the Synod process, "walking together," is often regarded simply as a planning process: 'here are the problems in the Church and this is how we fix them.' The Synod process, however, is a way of "being Church."

The Synod process expresses the spirituality of the Second Vatican Council pointing to a Church that always listens and engages the world. At the heart of that spirituality is a sense of wonder, amazement that love never dies. Out of crucified lives, all creation is created anew in Christ. For all the challenges within the Church, in our society, and in our lives, God's world is a wonderful world, filled with the possibility of renewal.

My hope is that we will be able to use the reflection questions to gather with one another, listen to one another, and deepen our bonds of community. Our team continues to work on ways to gather together.



Peace and blessings,

Rev. Gilbert Martinez, CSP

Father Gil


OUR BELOVED ITALIAN PINE TREE

A NOTE OF THANKS

For over one hundred years a majestic Italian pine tree stood in front of the rectory at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community in the Westwood neighborhood of Los Angeles. Its strong, durable trunk and branches were a gathering point for countless photos of celebratory moments such as baptisms, first communions and weddings. This beautiful tree also offered a welcoming spot for anyone needing to shed tears for a lost loved one, or to pray over a major life transition. It was a symbol of ongoing life and continuity for our faith community and surrounding neighborhood. In a certain way it also symbolized the parish slogan -- *Wherever you are on your faith journey, you are welcome here.*

As the St. Paul's Synod Committee completed this report on the responses gathered from nearly 600 individuals who participated in our parish-level listening process for the worldwide Synod on Synodality, our much-loved Italian pine tree was cut down. After growing for so many years, the tree experienced such significant decay that it could not be nurtured back to health. The news of the tree removal stunned many in our community. So many of us took for granted the notion that this symbol of rock-solid stability would continue to grow and flourish. We now need to acknowledge that the tree has lived the course of its life and that we need to let go and welcome something new and different.

It occurs to our committee that there are parallels between this occurrence and what we are experiencing as current, former or marginalized Catholics. There are so many ways that we have been challenged and shaken. Active Catholics who regularly attend Mass have endured separation from the Eucharist during a prolonged worldwide pandemic; the lingering effects of the clerical sex abuse crisis still cause many Catholics to distrust or separate from the broader institutional Church; the Church's stance on LGBTQ persons and the role of women in the Church are a source of pain for both active and former Catholics.

However, as Christians we believe in the possibility of new life and renewal. The worldwide Synod on Synodality presently convened by Pope Francis is opening opportunities for dialogue that most of us have never experienced as Catholics. The level of participation in our in-person listening sessions and online listening survey was truly encouraging. We heard from a wide range of differing perspectives, from the joys of being Catholic, to the pains and challenges of practicing our faith. We hear you, and hold all of your insights with care as we think about how this community grows and learns from this synodal process. This is only the beginning of what will be a transformative force in our faith community. We offer our deep thanks for honestly and authentically engaging in this process.

Joan Doyle, Lisa Hendey, Claire Henning, Dan Macalinao, CSP, Lisa Wellik

ST. PAUL'S SYNOD COMMITTEE

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DURING ONE OF OUR IN-PERSON LISTENING SESSIONS

OUR SYNODAL PROCESS AT ST. PAUL'S

This is the first time in my 62 years that I recall being asked for feedback or input from "the Church" about my experiences as a Catholic.

592
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

131
in-person **listening session**

461
online listening survey

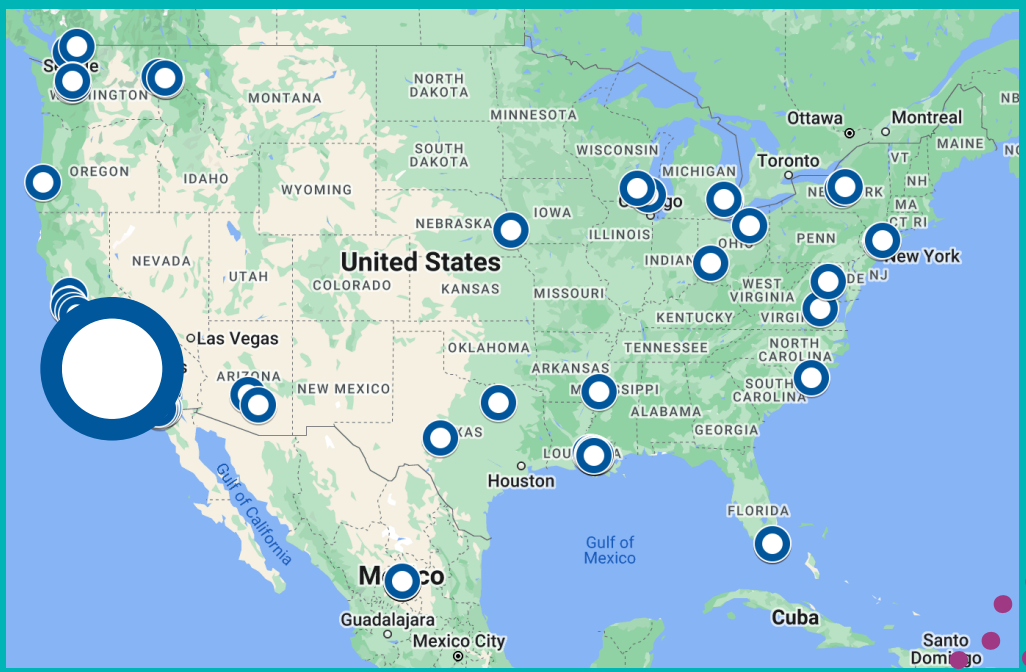
531
identify as Catholic

61
no longer Catholic / non-Catholic

298
current parishioners

294
outside the parish

PLACES REPRESENTED IN OUR SYNODAL PROCESS



OUR SYNODAL PROCESS AT ST. PAUL'S

It is precisely **this path of synodality** which God expects of **the Church of the third millennium**

A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission
Preparatory Document for the Synod

In October 2021, His Holiness Pope Francis extended an extraordinary invitation to the worldwide Catholic community. Through the Synod on Synodality, a global listening process opened to everyone, aimed at renewing our ability to live our Catholic mission and build union in our respective communities.

to **inspire** people to dream
about the Church we are called to be,
to **make hopes flourish**,
to **stimulate** trust,
to **bind up wounds**,
to **weave** new and deeper relationships,
to **learn** from one another,
to **build** bridges,
to **enlighten** minds, warm hearts and **restore** strength
to our hands for our common mission.

Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality

A **synod** is a gathering of the faithful with their clergy to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. Synodality is a style in which we, clergy and laity, journey together according to our roles and spiritual gifts, even beyond a designated synod period. Traditionally, the term synod has referred to an assembly of the Church's bishops gathering with the Pope. However, **the Synod on Synodality is unique in that it is the longest and broadest consultation of the faithful ever undertaken in the Catholic Church.**

Both the baptized faithful and our larger communities have been asked to engage in an exercise of listening, discerning and walking together, including those who disagree or think differently from those within our faith community. Those who have left the practice of the faith and non-Catholics are also part of the synodal process the entire Church is undertaking. Each person's voice and experience is vital to the path we are asked to walk together along this process.

With Pope Francis' vision in mind, the St. Paul's Synod Committee launched a parish-level listening process designed to be inclusive to those within our parish, as well as inactive and former Catholics. Our participation in this Synod on Synodality was guided by the timeline and resources offered through the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. To reach the desired populations, we offered the following opportunities for participation:

Four in-person listening sessions of two-to-three hours in length using the one-session format provided by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Three of these listening sessions were open to the entire parish community, with the remaining session offered specifically to the faculty and staff at our school. We had **131 parishioners** come to these sessions.

An online listening survey designed to capture feedback from both Catholics and non-Catholics, parishioners and non-parishioners. **401** participants who identified as Catholic answered questions pertaining to their personal experience of being Catholic, thoughts on Catholic doctrine, and for parishioners, their experience of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community. **61** participants identified as either no longer Catholic or non-Catholic, and answered questions regarding their present spiritual practices and beliefs.

These input opportunities yielded substantial written comments and feedback from those who participated in our process. On the whole, these responses provide an honest and authentic reflection of the experience our Catholic and non-Catholic participants have had with the Church. So many comments addressed the hurt experienced from Church teaching or clergy actions. Alternately, hopes for what the Church could be were expressed in response to questions such as how we can "journey together in the future" or "what would you say to Pope Francis if you had lunch with him?" From voluminous notes and survey responses, common majority themes emerged that we have captured in this report.

This first phase of our Synod process taught us that there is in fact a desire and willingness to share our experiences of Church and the Catholic faith in a safe space with others willing to listen. So many listening session participants learned that they are not alone in their thoughts and concerns.

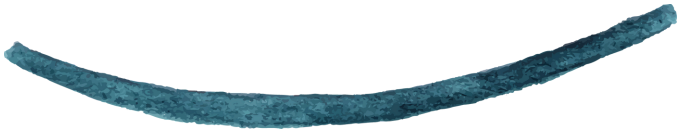
The dialogue itself had value and there is sincere interest in continuing this interaction, regardless of the outcome of the worldwide Synod process. Additionally, the survey input from those identifying as disaffiliated provides valuable insight into what causes so many to separate themselves from the Church.

The Synod on Synodality opens an opportunity for renewal at all levels of our Church, but particularly at the parish level. While expectations for change in broader Church teaching and doctrine need to be measured, there is a new possibility to address how we go forward as a local faith community. With care and respect, this report attempts to reflect the strengths, hopes and dreams of our parish for itself and the wider Church, acknowledging the challenges present locally, and the frustrations that those engaged with our process have with the wider Church. *This is only the beginning - this report is offered in a spirit to continue onward in our journey together.*



Regardless, we s**hould not confuse synodality with synods** ..... It is **not just a specific event nor a functional method**. It ..... ***defines a new way of proceeding for the Church as people of God***. Thus, it invites her to re-form by reconfiguring her into an ecclesial "we," **where all** subjects, from the pope to the laity, **are equals** and articulated in a **communion of faithful with the same responsibility** regarding the identity, vocation, and mission of the Church.

Rafael Luciani, *Synodality: A New Way of Proceeding in the Church (Paulist Press 2022)*




FIRST COMMUNION WEEKEND

BELIEF & FAITH PRACTICES

Owning my faith journey

Remember,
mystery isn't something
that you cannot understand.
It is something that
you can endlessly understand!
There is no point at which you can say,
"I've got it."
Always and forever,
mystery gets you!

Fr. Richard Rohr

KEY TAKEAWAYS
BELIEF & FAITH PRACTICES



Relating to God is easier than relating to Jesus Christ.

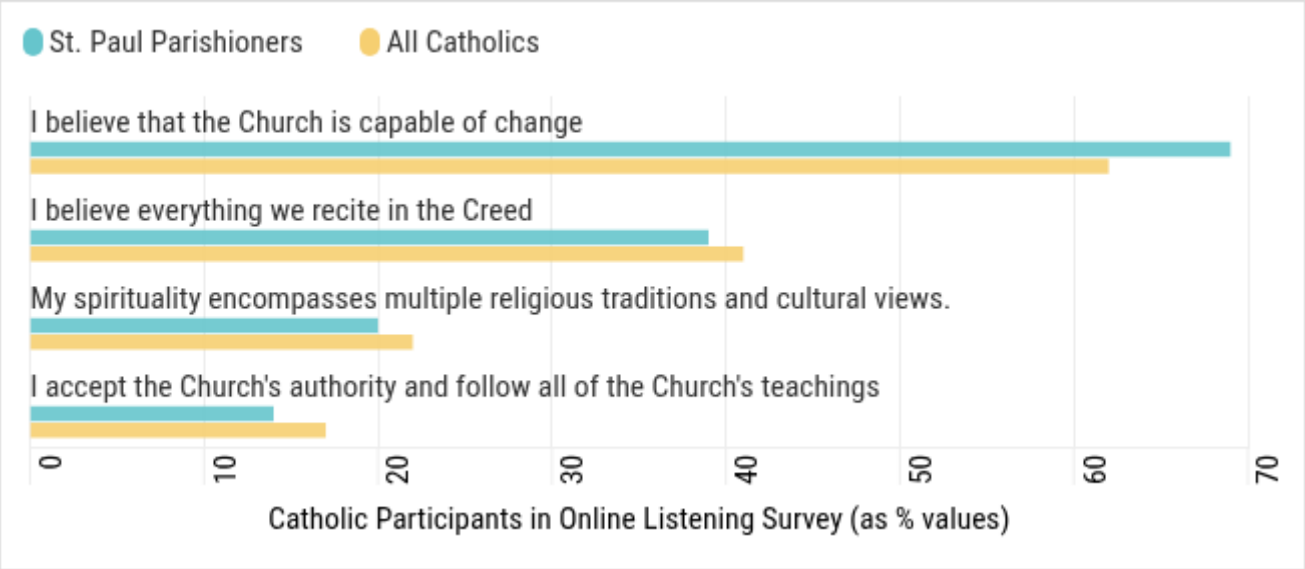
Living the message of Jesus is more important than the rules.





The Eucharist is fundamental and controversial.

BELIEF & FAITH PRACTICES



Everyone believes. Some beliefs are small and inconsequential - some are large and important. Beliefs can be grounded in proven fact or come out of a principle we support. Some beliefs remain constant throughout our lives and some change over time. But one thing is certain: our beliefs matter. They come from the deepest center of our being and shape our reality.

> **Within the context of a faith community, beliefs can be handed down to believers, much as parents hand down beliefs to their children.**
>
> Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, no.8

Religious beliefs have a unique place in our lives. As a community of faith, the Church offers a person access to a universe of tradition and meaning-making. The Church also teaches that the individual must always obey the certain judgment of his or her own well-formed conscience.

The Church offers us two propositions to hold in balance – on the one hand, a universal framework of belief, and on the other, how we understand and appropriate this framework into our lives based on the prescriptions of our conscience. *How do present-day American Catholics understand what it means to believe?* Our synodal process revealed a wide diversity.

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.

Documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no.16

CATHOLICS SPEAK

"We **should not be changing** our beliefs as the time changes."

"The Church is **a living body**, and its **doctrine needs to evolve** in order for Catholicism to survive, let alone grow."

"**Who is responsible** for determining what the new doctrine will be? How do we know that the new doctrine comes from God?"

"I wish we would spend less energy on doctrine and more on the message of Jesus. **We nitpick the life out of mystery**. I wish we would simply focus on acting justly, loving tenderly, walking humbly. I wish we would do away with the pomp and our hierarchical structure."

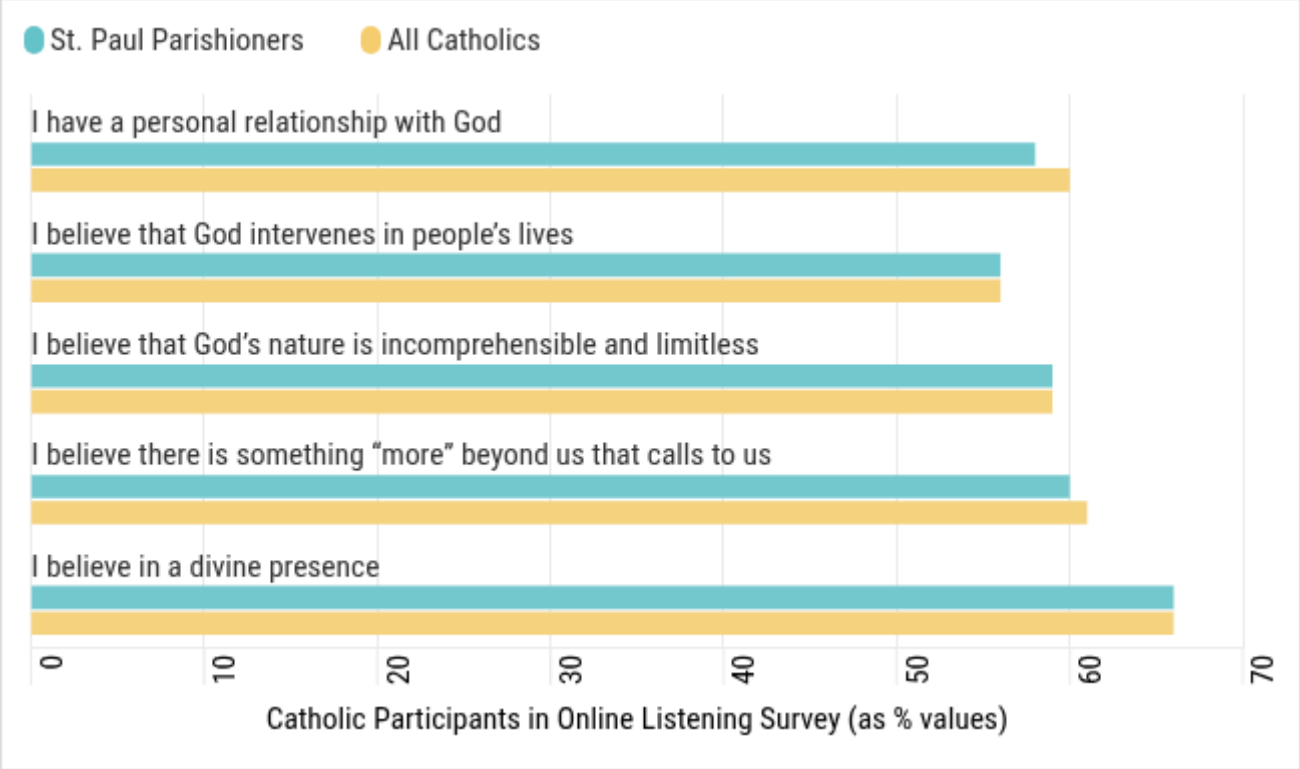
"**There is confusion** regarding what Catholics are allowed to think, do, or believe (in order) to be "good" Catholics."

There is a second-century Syrian way of being Christian, an eight century Irish way, a twelfth-century Eastern Orthodox way, and a fifteenth-century Chinese way.

Marcus Borg

Is there a twenty-first century way of being Catholic? Historically, there have been many ways of interpreting Christianity and living the Christian life. Perhaps looking at some areas of belief and faith practice noted by those who participated in our synodal process might offer a glimpse into how Catholics are living the Christian life today.

GOD



From my point of view,
God is the light that illuminates the darkness,
even if it does not dissolve it,
and a **spark of divine light is within each of us**.

Pope Francis

A majority of our participants indicated that they are comfortable with the idea of communion with an unknowable, limitless God. Many have a personal relationship with God and many believe that God intervenes in their personal lives. As far back as St. Augustine, Christianity has understood that searching for God is searching for a limitless, incomprehensible Other.

...**God remains beyond our intellect and so in unknown to us**. Hence, the supreme knowledge which we have of God is to know that we do not know God, insofar as we know that what God is surpasses all that we can understand.

St. Augustine

What image of God we settle on matters a great deal. It not only shapes what we imagine God may be like, it also shapes what we think our life is about. People whose image of God is that of a warrior may become warriors themselves, whether in a Christian crusade, Muslim jihad, or an apocalyptically-minded militia. People who think of God as righteous are likely to emphasize righteousness themselves, just as those who imagine God as compassionate are likely to emphasize compassion.

For Christians, our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God – the second person of the Trinity – makes him the most intimate discloser of who God is. But as you will read in the next section, our understanding of Jesus Christ can be complicated.

As the Father loves me,
so I also love you.
Remain in my love.
John 15:9

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands, no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes
with which Christ looks out
his compassion to the world.

Yours are the feet
with which he is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands
with which he is to bless us now.
St. Teresa of Avila

MY EXPERIENCE OF FAITH & BELIEF

"God gave us **the gift of our conscience** which calls each of us to inform and use ours wisely with regard to doctrine. **A transparent, personal response to God** is more important than blind obedience to an institutional Church."

"I am **happy because of my relationship** with God. I love my Catholic Church."

"We don't have the courage to be proud to say we are Catholic."

"My Catholic faith is the **center of my life.**"

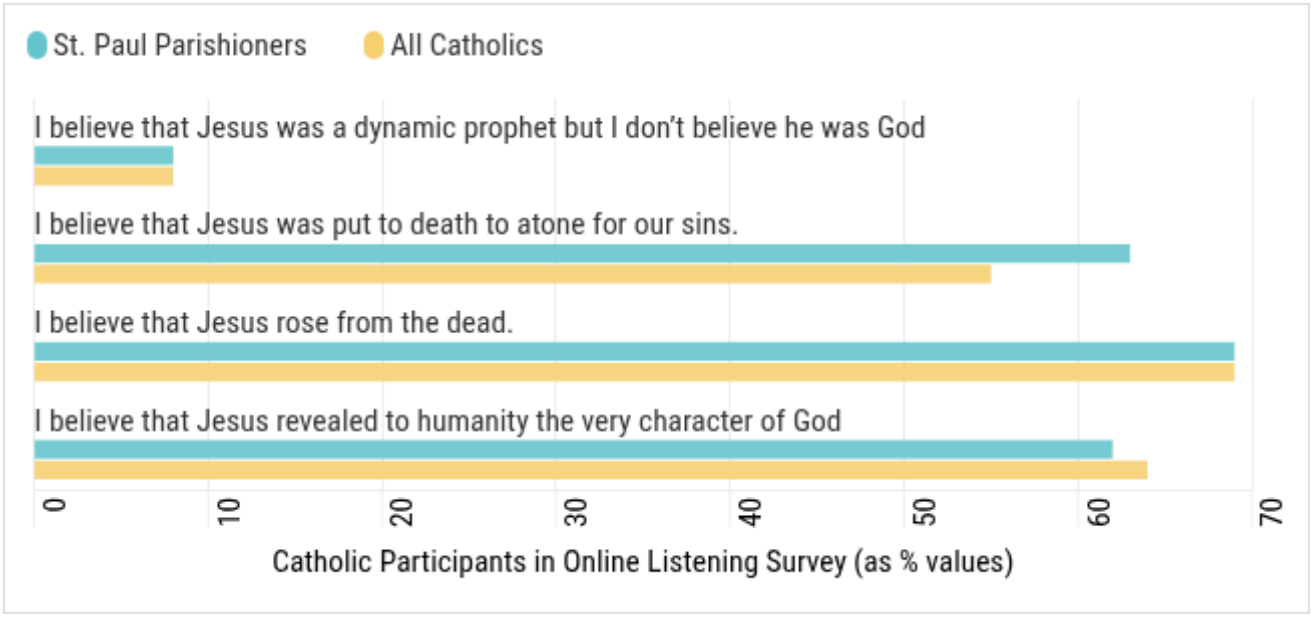
"It's **more cultural** than devotional for me."

"I've maintained my faith but have **not been impressed** with the Church lately."

The real spiritual journey is work.
You can make a naïve assertion
that you trust in Jesus,
but **until it is tested** a good,
oh, 200 times,
I doubt very much that it's true.

Fr. Richard Rohr

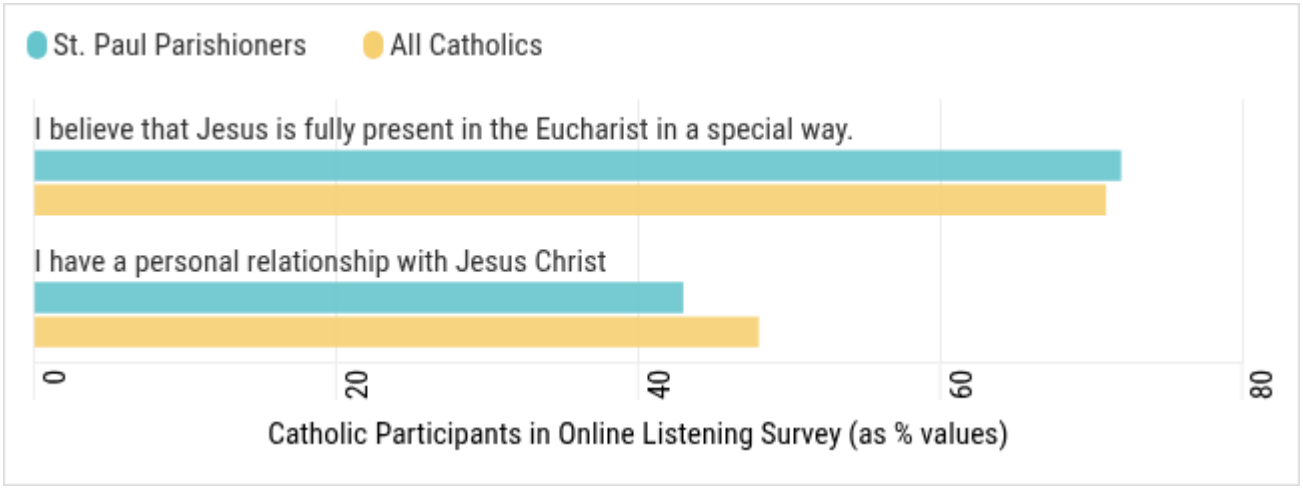
JESUS CHRIST



Who is Jesus Christ in the lives of Catholics today? For many, this is a complex question that can be difficult to answer. Many in our synodal process shared how they understand Jesus Christ and what their relationship with Jesus looks like. The comments surfaced doubts and questions of faith among many Catholics. They seemed to hold a tension as they try to synthesize their understanding of Church teaching with what their individual consciences (and the Holy Spirit) might be nudging them to explore

Often, the idea of a "personal relationship" with Jesus is shunned by Catholics because it is seen as an overtly Evangelical or Protestant idea. In our online listening survey, **less than half** indicated having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Surprisingly, **more than two-thirds** of the same respondents indicated that they believe Jesus to be fully present in the Eucharist in a special way. Taken together, they suggest a need to explore how we understand the Eucharist as well as how we understand the ministry and the person of Jesus Christ.

We Catholics can sometimes feel uneasy talking about faith questions or doubts. A synodal Church, one which asks us to journey with one another, challenges us not only to be honest about our own faith experience, but to encounter, accompany and listen to our fellow travelers along the way - travelers who may not look at faith and belief the same way we do.



ME AND **JESUS CHRIST**

"Doctrine doesn't matter to me as much as living the message of Jesus. **Proclaim the Gospel at all times:** when necessary, use words. **Act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly.**"

"**I know Jesus was here**, as a human on this earth. I don't believe he arose from the dead. I think he is the son of God, just as we are all sons and daughters of God. But after he died, I believe his followers created a myth of his resurrection to perpetuate a religion."

"I believe that Jesus, the Son of God, CHOSE to die in order to defeat death and reconcile fallen humanity to God. I don't believe God the Father forced him to suffer to atone for our sins. I believe it was a voluntary act of love that **he became fully human in order to redeem us**."

"I believe God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are their own separate things, not all one."

THE **EUCHARIST**

For Catholics, the Eucharist is the ultimate religious ritual – "the fount and apex of the Christian life" (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11). It is through the Eucharist that we are invited into an intimate encounter with God, and where we sustain ourselves in faith, discipleship and community. The closing of churches during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic prevented many Catholics from receiving the Eucharist, making many in the Church realize how much we had previously taken this sacrament for granted. We heard many in our synodal process reflect about the importance of the Eucharist in their lives. Additionally, many spoke to the significant polarization that exists today regarding who should be able to receive the Eucharist.

THE **EUCHARIST**

"**Reception of the Eucharist is an essential part of my life**. It was very difficult to be cut off from the sacraments during the pandemic."

"The host **shouldn't** be a political issue."

"Offer communion to everyone who attends Mass and wants it."

"I believe **being a Catholic means a great responsibility** to all of Christianity because we live, or should I say we are suppose to live, the sacramental life of the Church. In two of the seven sacraments, we receive baptism and with great humility **we receive in communion the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ**."

STORIES OF FAITH

"**I was raised to believe in God and the Catholic Church**; however, many things that happened through my childhood, made me question the validity of the Church in my life. My belief and faith in God, in Jesus and the Holy Spirit has never wavered, but all the "mandates" of the Church, felt so constraining.

However, once I moved away from home to go to university, **I realized I needed to be a part of something that brought people together**, as I lived far away from my family, I missed the sharing and caring. Therefore, I started to go to Mass every Sunday and felt so much comfort and peace. I went through the RCIA and did my First Communion at 27 years of age. I met my husband 9 years later and got married at The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

I was very excited to have my children attend a Catholic School, hoping to instill in them the same values and love for God that were instilled in me. However, I found that God's love and forgiveness is not always demonstrated to the kids; sadly, after having a religion teacher who talks about how many "different" people are not accepted by God, **my children have chosen that the Catholic Church is not for them**. This makes me sad because through my life, God has always been there for me, and I believe in being part of the Church is important, so for my children to question the validity of my belief, is very difficult for me."

HAVING FAITH IN A FLAWED CHURCH

Our message and methodology have changed, do change, and **must change** if we are faithful to the ongoing and **unchanging mission of Jesus Christ**.

Brian C. McLaren

Throughout the twenty pages of responses from our in-person listening sessions and over a hundred pages of responses from our online listening survey, the committee recognized a consistent underlying theme – a yearning for change. Also, despite a large majority indicating they believe the Church is capable of change, the comments suggest that most feel powerless in this regard. If the Church is capable of change, the comments suggest that this is so only from the top down. As often as the post-Vatican II Church refers to itself as "The People of God," when it comes to implementing change, these very People find themselves without a voice, and, instead, view "Church" as a monolithic, indifferent "other."

It was not surprising that the need for revision and renewal in the Church was expressed strongly by the 61 disaffiliated people who took the survey, but it was expressed with equal passion in comments made by practicing Catholics in every category explored by this report. The Catholic comments fell largely into two general areas:

1. The Church as a rule-driven culture, unable to adapt to the signs of the times.
Comments often used the term the "institutional church," which sometimes referred to the Pope and the Vatican, and sometimes to the American bishops. There was a sense that some rules are judgmental, prescriptive, and no longer relevant to the times. Not only are these rules considered irrelevant, but participants wrote that they are damaging the vitality of the Church today, which causes them to worry for its future. They suggested that the Church we have today is less about the ministry of Jesus than it is about institutional maintenance and preservation.

ME AND **THE CHURCH**

"Understanding God within a personal relationship **not thru manipulating** God for perfect adherence to rules."

"**I have so many struggles** with the institutional church positioning itself against people...putting up blockades and making it complicated to be Catholic in the world."

"**It is a difficult journey these days**. Foolish adherence to rules that make no sense, politicization of bishops and exclusion of too many make being Catholic questionable."

"My experience of Catholicism has been that it can be too **stiff and stifling at times**. There are rules that seem to be only for the sake of having rules. (...)"

"**The Church is too judgmental**. There is a big contradiction. In our everyday life the institution has become huge. The Church is in fear of losing its power and money so they have to control by rules."

2. The polarization that is dividing the American Church

The Gospels tells us that one of the things that distinguished Jesus from the other religious preachers of his time was that he spoke with authority, while the others did not. Today there appear to be multiple "authorities" within the Church, claiming to know the will of God. What it means to be an American Catholic today is often defined by "which camp you are in." The Church is called to be leaven for society, not just a mirror of it. It appears that the Church is moving toward change – its mission demands it. Pope Francis has a vision of what that change might look like.



A **POLARIZED** CHURCH

"The Church **needs healing within itself**. It's polarized and we need to **find "a commonality"** to bring it together."

> "I have been questioning lately the nature of my Catholicism as there seems to be **increasing divisiveness in the church** – especially in the American Catholic Church. I am greatly concerned that while there is a message of "All are Welcome," the deeds of some church leaders – especially the American Council of Bishops (sic) – is the essence of exclusionary practice. It is disheartening."

"I am annoyed at **the lack of dialogue around the really important issues of our day** (climate change, immigration, war, capital punishment, etc.) and the absolute focus on one: abortion."

> **"Can we try to talk/focus on the things we have in common and not the things that divide us?"**

"I dream of a "missionary option," that is, **a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything**, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably **channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation**...to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level **more inclusive and open**, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom **Jesus summons to friendship with him**."

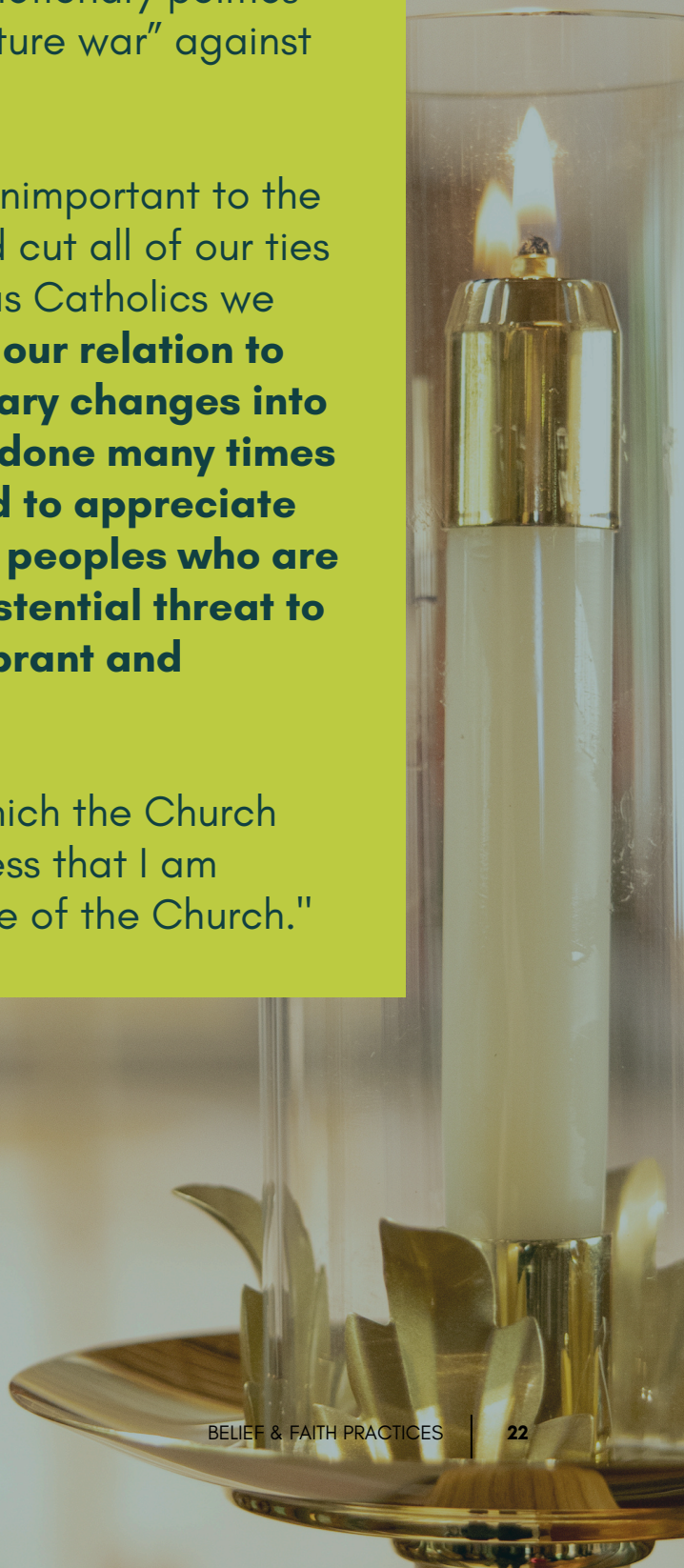
Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel (*Evangelii Gaudium)*, no. 27

HOPING FOR **RENEWAL**

"I find it extremely distressing that many prominent (particularly American) Catholics seem to define their faith as little more than a reactionary politics that must be defended in the “culture war” against people who are different.

This is not to say that tradition is unimportant to the Catholic Church or that we should cut all of our ties to the past, but I do believe that as Catholics we are **called to carefully consider our relation to the past, to incorporate necessary changes into Catholic doctrine (as has been done many times in the history of the church), and to appreciate that the diversity of beliefs and peoples who are different from us are not an existential threat to the church, but make it more vibrant and creative**.

However, given the direction in which the Church seems to be heading, I must confess that I am deeply concerned about the future of the Church."



FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
BELIEF & FAITH PRACTICES

SEASON OF ADVENT, SESSION 1

PRAYER BEFORE FAITH SHARING

We bless you Lord for our calling, for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart. A heart that rejoices in your coming, a heart sustained by your Spirit, a heart encouraged by fellow disciples.

May there grow in each of our hearts the disciple's willingness to learn, and the disciple's joy in becoming a medium of your grace. **AMEN**

From "Prayers for Parish Groups," Harrington and Kavanagh

1. What findings most struck you in the Belief and Faith Practices Chapter?

2. If you were to describe your image of God today in a word or phrase, what would it be and why? Has that image changed or remained the same over time?

3. Some of our parishioners as well as other Catholics who took the survey indicated that they have a stronger sense of a personal relationship with God than they do with Jesus Christ. Why do you think that is? Is it true for you?

4. Looking around our culture today, it is clear that there are many ways to interpret Christianity and to live the Christian life. What, for you, are the most essential aspects of being a Christian? How do you "live the Gospel" in your daily life?

5. What makes you specifically a Catholic Christian? What, for you, are the most essential aspects of being a Catholic Christian today? How are they part of your life?

6. One participant wrote that "The Catholic Church needs healing within itself." What is one thing that you can do to bring about this healing, that is, to enhance the identity and mission of the Church?



OUR CHURCH DURING THE FEAST OF PENTECOST



HALO HOSPITALITY MINISTRY
SERVING DONUTS AFTER THE 9:30 AM MASS

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

We are One Body

**So we, who are many
are one body in Christ,
and individually members
one of another.**

Romans 12:6

KEY TAKEAWAYS
OUR COMMUNITY



Our parish - homey & intimidating, *a work-in-progress*

Church and School - Reaching Out to Each Other





So much more to do - faith formation, young adults, social justice



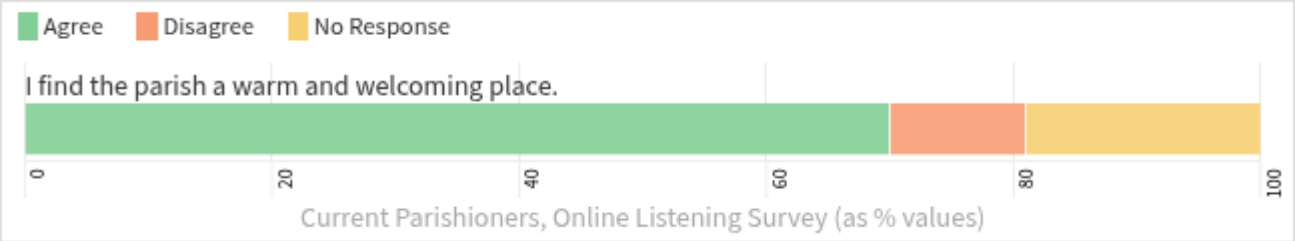
SPRINKLING RITE DURING THE SEASON OF EASTER

OUR COMMUNITY

'WELCOMING' AND 'BELONGING' ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS

Wherever you are on your faith journey, you are welcome here.

St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community
Parish Mission Statement



Our parish slogan is: *"Wherever you are on your faith journey you are welcome here."* Since the inception of our parish in 1928, its spiritual care has been entrusted to the Paulist Fathers, a religious community of priests with a particular charism for bringing voice to the gospel in fresh new ways, especially to those who feel marginalized in the Church or who have been alienated from the practice of faith. Consequently, the parish has a long-standing reputation for being a place of welcome and inclusion. In our synodal process, many parishioners reflected on the welcoming and inclusive dimensions of our parish.

A PLACE OF **WELCOME**

"(St. Paul the Apostle) has always had an **open mind to the different situations people** have and welcome them."

"I enjoy the parish – it is **cozy and welcoming.** It is not as large as other parish communities, however, **everyone comes to know each other as a result**."

"My parish is my **spiritual community/family**"

"I feel **homey** in this parish"

Others, however, shared feeling 'unseen' or intimidated by the parish's dynamic.

THE CHALLENGE OF **BELONGING**

"The parish can be **intimidating to get involved (in)**."

"**As a single person I often feel unseen** by my parish which centers everything around families."

The Synod listening process taught us that **feeling welcome and feeling that you belong are two separate things.** We learned that a number of people in our parish desire a greater sense of belonging. This was also echoed by Catholics from across the country looking for deeper connections to their faith communities.

To be welcoming, a parish needs an open door and a friendly reputation. Belonging to a parish goes deeper. Belonging is the human emotional need for interpersonal relationships, affiliations, connectedness, and acceptance within a group, or as St. Paul writes in Romans, to be members of one another. When people feel that they belong to a faith community, they feel safe enough to be themselves and they want to show up, participate and contribute.

Do we know the people with whom we worship when we come together for Sunday Mass? Do we notice who is missing? **Belonging is more than recognizing the face in the pew across the aisle.** It requires that we reach out, say hello, and get to know one another. That common bond of belonging creates a faith community that is committed, not only to its members, but to its mission.

CREATING **MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS**

"It's important to **keep relationships alive, to go deeper**. We need **more activities to get together after Mass**. We need to create an **atmosphere that promotes community**...where all are welcome."

"At church we all sit in the same place - **how aware are we of who is next to us or who is missing**? Church should have more personal/individual **invitations for people to join a ministry or help out**. Reach out a little and show people they are noticed."

Christianity, at its core, is a communal endeavor. We believe in it when community works; we stop believing in it when community breaks down. Our primary task today is to live community. If we can do that, then the visible body of Christ, the Church, will have an incredible resurrection.

Hospitality
Treating someone like they belong.
Before they belong.
Until they belong.

Unknown




PAULIST FATHERS
NEXT-GEN RACER
PISTON CUP RACING SERIES
WAY AHEAD OF YOU

THE **DYNAMICS** OF THE **CHURCH** AND **SCHOOL**

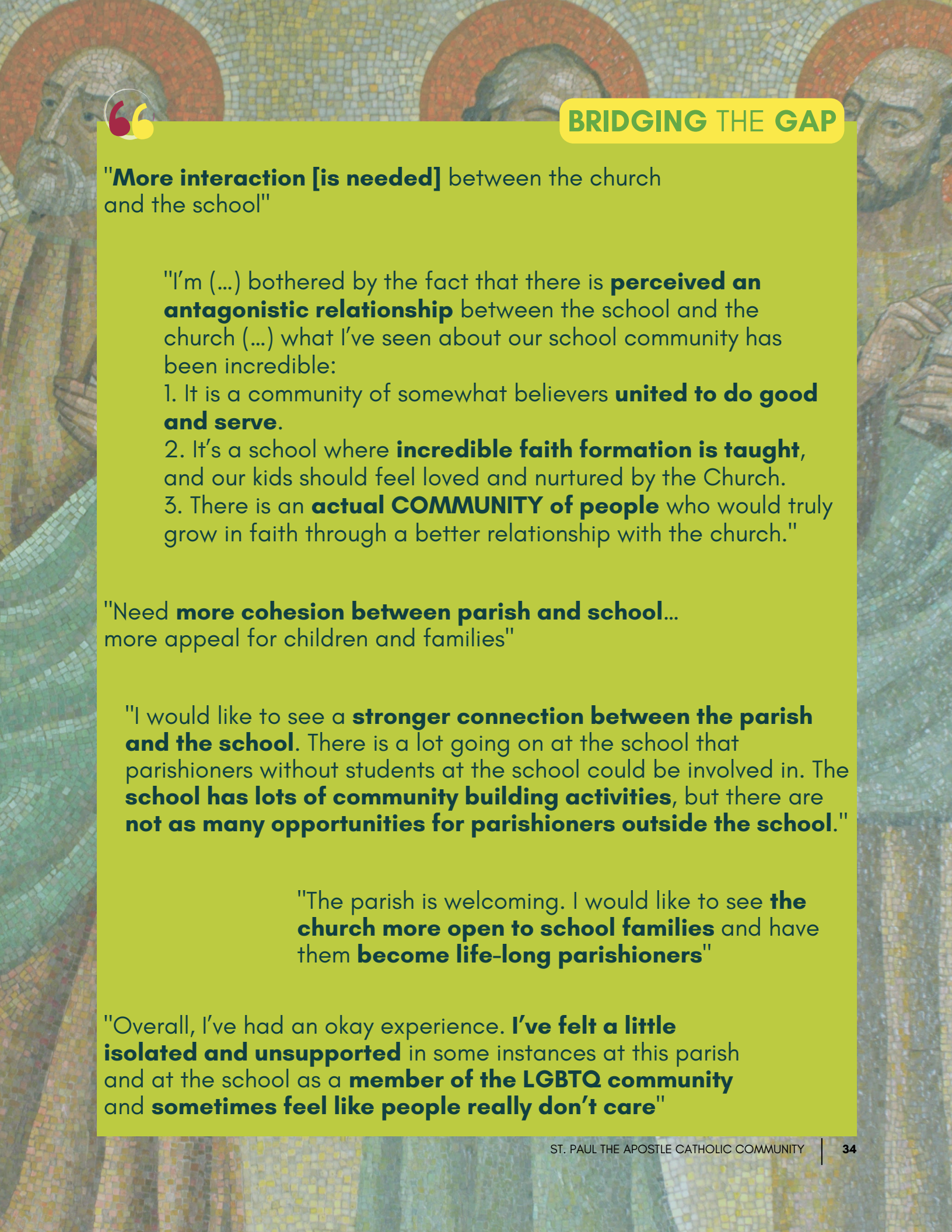
The Archdiocese of Los Angeles (ADLA) comprises three counties here in California: Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles and contains a population of over four million Catholics. Annually, the ADLA publishes a directory (available to the public) detailing all of the personnel, departments, and entities (including schools) that it oversees. St. Paul the Apostle School is listed there as one of the 189 parish elementary schools in the Archdiocese, but information about it can only be found by consulting the section in the directory dedicated to parishes. So, in the eyes of the Archdiocese, our school is a parish school.

This would have been a non-issue when our school was founded in 1935. Then, and for many years thereafter, it was a given that the students in our parish school were our parish children. Parishes had geographical boundaries set by the Archdiocese that were expected to be observed. If you lived within the boundaries of a parish you registered as a member of that parish. Outside those boundaries, you belonged in a different parish:

"At one time you had to live in the area to attend this parish. Only problem with SPA [now] is the **divide between 'church families' and 'school families'**."

Archdiocesan data point to the legal structure in the Archdiocese, but they don't speak to the soul of any parish or school. Information about the history of our school points to the "then," but not to the "now." However, our Synod listening sessions and survey data are personal, and they speak to current perceptions -- what the relationship between the school and the church feels like to school families or what it appears to be to parishioners not personally affiliated with the school.

While there are exceptions, the majority of the data received from both the survey and the listening sessions seems to indicate a drift of the school and church away from each other…as well as a desire for some sort of return.



BRIDGING THE GAP

"**More interaction [is needed]** between the church and the school"

"I'm (...) bothered by the fact that there is **perceived an antagonistic relationship** between the school and the church (...) what I've seen about our school community has been incredible:
1. It is a community of somewhat believers **united to do good and serve**.
2. It's a school where **incredible faith formation is taught**, and our kids should feel loved and nurtured by the Church.
3. There is an **actual COMMUNITY of people** who would truly grow in faith through a better relationship with the church."

"Need **more cohesion between parish and school**... more appeal for children and families"

"I would like to see a **stronger connection between the parish and the school**. There is a lot going on at the school that parishioners without students at the school could be involved in. The **school has lots of community building activities**, but there are **not as many opportunities for parishioners outside the school**."

"The parish is welcoming. I would like to see **the church more open to school families** and have them **become life-long parishioners**"

"Overall, I've had an okay experience. **I've felt a little isolated and unsupported** in some instances at this parish and at the school as a **member of the LGBTQ community** and **sometimes feel like people really don't care**"

There is much to be gained from our Synod process contributors (both in-person and online). So many have pointed to a need for more unity between these two entities (church and school). A current parishioner and former school parent contributed a bit of honest introspection in our synodal process. It might point the way to healing the separation felt by many:

"When we first joined the parish 26 years ago, we didn't find it warm and welcoming. We thought about changing churches, but we stayed because we felt it was **important for [our children] to attend Mass in the church connected with the school**, **hoping to find community**. Over the years we've gotten to know folks and have made good friends. We aren't sure if the parish has become more welcoming, which I hope is the case, or if we had to stretch ourselves."

The above comment suggests that both church and school would benefit from some intentional movement toward each other. Over the years, experience has demonstrated that creativity at SPA knows no bounds. So, our Synodal awareness might actually be the boost we need to step up and collaborate in creating ways that can restitch the relationship between our school and church.



(that) there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another

First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (12:25)



ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE DURING FIRST COMMUNION WEEKEND

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE **MASS**

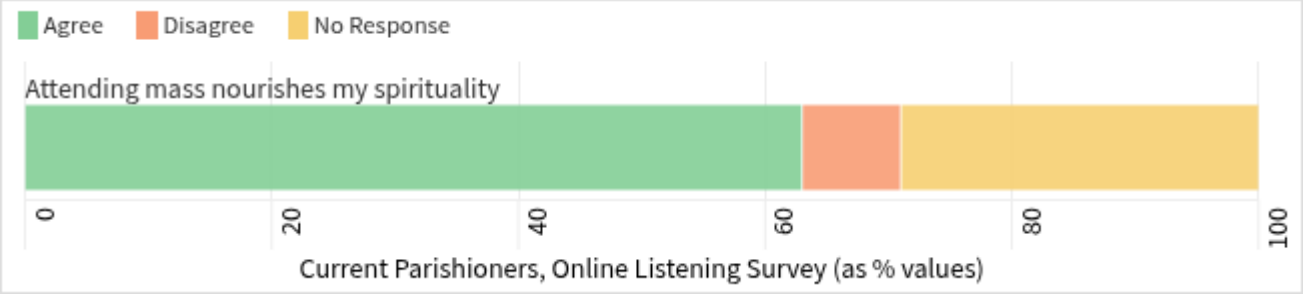
A Christianity without a liturgy, I dare say, is perhaps a Christianity without Christ

Pope Francis, Weekly Audience (February 3, 2021)

Liturgy – the public worship of the Church - provides us the opportunity to gather as a community of faith. Every Sunday we are invited to come together to celebrate the traditions and mysteries of our faith, and to receive the grace offered in the Eucharist. This central ritual of our Catholic practice is often explained through the framework of a treasured family Thanksgiving meal -- we welcome each other, share stories of our family history, remember loved ones who are no longer with us, partake in a special meal, and depart from each other with the intent and hope to gather again. These familiar rituals are very similar to what we experience as we are present at Mass, only this time our host is Christ himself. Those who participated in our synodal process expressed in their own words why Mass is important to them.

"The only reason I continue as a Catholic is because **I find peace in the Mass**"

"I **appreciate the simplicity and ritual/tradition of the mass**; it provides a **structure** to minimize distraction and to focus on the essential, it reaffirms core beliefs, it **places me within a community of believers, united in worship, purpose and gratitude**"



11% of parishioners responding to our online listening survey said that **they felt isolated and alone when attending mass**

The reforms implemented by the Second Vatican Council made the Mass more accessible. The entire Mass was now offered in one's native language, allowing for active participation by those attending. A three-year cycle of readings was also introduced to better expose Catholics to scripture. Overall, the Mass became a cohesive and participatory experience for many Catholics, especially for those who did not understand Latin. The homily, the preaching event at Mass, was enriched because Catholics could now make connections between the homily and other elements of the liturgy.

The quality and importance of the homily were commented on by many of St. Paul's parishioners. They find the homily an important moment to experience how scripture relates to the present time.

THE **HOMILY**

"He [the priest] needs to relate to the **living experience** of his people, not just to the scripture"

> "It's confusing and if explained in more layman's terms at Mass I think more people would be interested to learn more about it. Especially at children's mass- the topic HAS to be directed toward kids and **the sermon done as "normal" people would speak**"

"I used to attend masses at — , but wanted to find a parish that spoke more to me as a young adult. **I appreciate the homilies by all the priests as they do a good job diving into the readings**."

> "I find it **difficult to connect** with the homily said at my church (St. Paul the Apostle). It is often **too long and not relevant**. It is annoying that the priests read their homilies. It is though they aren't moved or passionate about what they say. It makes me feel like (...) I could read it, and then skip mass all together, in terms of the homily."

"**Not always able to feel uplifted** - only some priests can help you connect with God. Not always clear what the message is that can stay with me from the homily/readings."

68% of parishioners responding to our online listening survey said that **homilies help them** understand the readings and its significance to their lives.

THE IMPORTANCE OF **MUSIC**

Music is another dimension of the liturgical experience about which parishioners reflected. The range of liturgical music styles and options also expanded after the Second Vatican Council. Sacred music now takes a variety of styles - Gregorian chant, contemporary hymns, and gospel spirituals. Other varied comments offered by parishioners indicate that there is interest in having music offerings that are modern, accessible, and easy to sing.

The one who sings prays twice
St. Augustine

MUSIC IN MASS

"Music is why I attend Mass at St. Paul's. It is so **important to have high caliber music** to enrich the experience"

"**Music is a big part** of the Mass experience that makes going to Mass more enjoyable. Please **continue to invest in a contemporary music program**"

"Music is excellent at SPA (St. Paul the Apostle). **Worth every penny**. Not just for SPA members but to visitors to our church. Glad to be done with groups that "perform" instead of truly **partake in the liturgy**. Good variety."

"While I enjoy the music at mass, **I miss when we used to have a full band during the 9:30 mass**".

"If I didn't like the music at SPA, I wouldn't have stayed at the parish more than likely."

EFFECTS OF THE **COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Attending Mass was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some synod participants express gratitude for the effective use of Mass live-streaming. Others reflected on the effect of being physically unable to attend mass.

"COVID: Being outside of the church led children to be distracted, disconnected, and needing more prompting to participate. Online masses don't work for everyone. Permission to not attend church in person developed a habit in some and (are) now not returning"

The church 're-opened' for Sunday Mass in Summer 2021. Since then, the combined attendance at our five weekend liturgies has been approximately **60%** of the pre-pandemic attendance level. This decline in attendance is an experience shared with other parishes throughout the archdiocese.

BRINGING BACK THE FAITHFUL

Comments provided by the in-person listening session attendees offer insights into liturgical and educational offerings that may interest and encourage a greater number of parishioners to attend Mass.

- Have Masses for **specific purposes or intentions** such as social justice/climate change themes, healing liturgies and continue the All Souls Mass litany of the deceased.

- Would like **teaching on the meaning of the Mass** including the meaning of the altar, the architecture of the church, clerical vestments, and parts of the liturgy.

Finally, a thorough reading of the listening session participant and survey comments provides some overall insight into current motivations to attend Mass. There are comments indicating that a certain portion of St. Paul's parishioners and other respondents are drawn to a reverent and holy Mass experience and reception of the Eucharist. A small minority prefer the pre-Second Vatican Council Latin Mass. Alternately, there are those who seek a more communal, social and inspirational Mass experience. An awareness of these motivations will be helpful for future St. Paul's parish renewal and liturgy planning efforts.

"I would like **more access** to the Tridentine Mass."

"**Eucharist was the big draw** to being in the church."

"**Social Interaction has become a catalyst** for attending Mass."



VIA, OUR MINISTRY FOR THOSE IN THEIR 20s & 30s

YOUNG ADULTS

> Whatever you do, **do not become the sorry sight of an abandoned vehicle**! Don't be parked cars, but **dream freely and make good decisions**. **Take risks**, even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anesthetized or approach the world like tourists. **Make a ruckus! Cast out the fears that paralyze you**, so that you don't become young mummies. **Live**! Give yourselves over to the best of life! **Open the door of the cage, go out and fly**! Please, don't take an early retirement.
>
> Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, no. 143

A total of 65 individuals between the ages of 18-39 responded to our listening survey. The majority of their written responses indicate a strong interest in seeing the Church respond to current societal concerns, including ministry to the LGBTQ community, the abortion debate, concern for climate, and the formation of social programs.

The "Young Adult" category encompasses a variety of vocational and familial situations, including singles, young married couples, and young families. Many young practicing Catholics feel an increasing tension between official Church teachings and evolving societal norms and trends. They feel a need for increased opportunities to develop strong relationships in the Church that will sustain their personal faith journeys while at the same time connecting them with others their age.

With respect to ministry oriented toward serving young adults, synod responses seem to dictate that we recognize this group as widely diverse in their vocational statuses, their attitudes about faith, and their interest in seeing the connection between personal spirituality and their overall wellbeing, even if they are not actively practicing their Catholic faith. Many young adults desire a Church that is increasingly open and inclusive.

THE VOICES OF **YOUNG ADULTS**

"As the Catholic church, our values, beliefs, and lobbying have the power to significantly sway political policy and legislation. Therefore, we must reconsider the long-held stance that abortion is anti-Catholic. Similarly with any anti-LGBT sentiments. **Grounded in social justice and love for all of God's people**, we should be championing equal access to reproductive healthcare and LGBT affirming healthcare for all-- because these are human rights."

"I would love to talk to Pope Francis about the young adult Catholic community and the need to create communities in every parish that foster virtuous friendships between college/school and family life and/or religious community. I would also love to talk to Pope Francis about **the need for small groups throughout all Catholic communities**. (That is one thing that our Christian brothers and sisters do very well!)"

"It's time for **changes that actually reflect** a loving God."



STORIES OF FAITH

"I know that I could be more involved but it has been hard with COVID and **being a single person in my late 30s who does not neatly fit into any of the set categories** - young people who hang out at VIA (Young Adult Ministry) are in their 20s, families with kids tend to be more my age but are focused on that whereas I do not have kids, and most of the people attending mass on a weekly basis are in their 60s and above. **I am trying to find the courage and time to get more involved.**"

FAITH FORMATION

In the last decade or so, the term "Religious Education" has significantly given way to the term "Faith Formation." One hears it most often in reference to adults – as in "Adult Faith Formation" (AFF) – than to children or teens.

Faith Formation seems a better description of what is needed to help people mature in their faith. Important as it is, Religious Education is a lot more about gathering information, with the possibility of a bit of prayer and liturgy as addenda. But Faith Formation reminds us that we are something more than information gatherers. We are people of faith, a faith that ought to grow and deepen. That does not happen through knowledge alone. It must also involve personal experience, Scripture, prayer, dialogue, and reflection - for a lifetime.

"Participating in Bible Study strengthens one's faith."

"Women's Faith Sharing group has been an anchor"

63% of parishioners responding to our online listening survey said that **the parish gives them tools to support the practice of faith at home.**

In 1999, the U.S. Bishops issued an important document on the topic of Adult Faith Formation entitled **Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us; A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States** (OHWB). A look at just two statements in the document suggests concrete issues that parishes face with regard to Adult Faith Formation:

> **"[It is] the axis around which revolves the catechesis of childhood and adolescence as well as that of old age."** (§ 5)
>
> **"[Its] implementation point[s] to "the challenge...to provide resources to build adult faith without undermining other educational activities already engaged."** (§ 178)

Classes and visiting speakers are not the only way to implement AFF, as some may think. The document painted a broader picture that can include everything from homilies at Mass to a parish website – from prayer groups and Bible study sessions to parent involvement in the catechesis of their children preparing for sacraments.

At SPA we have all of the above. Yet emerging from our Synodal process were comments pointing to something missing from the parish commitment to the faith formation of our adult parishioners. The discussions produced varied comments, but with a common message: The great majority of participants expressed a real hunger for the parish to make available ways for adults to learn about their faith in order to grow in their faith.

HOPES FOR FAITH FORMATION

"Desire for **ongoing** adult education to **grow in faith** (greater reverence for the Eucharist, sacraments, and liturgy)"

"Mindfulness of developing faith formation. **Different ways of teaching, retreats**"

"There is a **hunger for deeper understanding** (e.g. catechism II) for adults"

"Education of all should be in **the spirit of the Beatitudes** as a basis for our Catholic faith."

"Regular Wednesday night meeting that Catholics could attend to learn **what it means to live the gospel**"

"The Church should teach us through **workshops**"

"**Emphasis** on catechesis"

"**Where** is Catholic adult education?"

"I **worry about heresy** coming into the Church in our modern times."

"The ministry of Catholic Teaching and **evangelization needs a massive update and an overhaul**. Good Catholic Values and principles do not have to change, despite the fact that they are unpopular in an increasingly material world ... but that should not be an impossible barrier ... "



ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE DADS SERVING PANCAKE BREAKFAST

IN **SERVICE** TO OUR **NEIGHBORS**

> It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. **Fraternity between all men and women … Let us dream, then, as a single human family**, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, **each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all**.
>
> Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 8

The correlation between living gospel values and a life of service to others was made clear by several online survey respondents.

> "I am disappointed by any person of any religion who faithfully attends Mass but does not practice the principle of love thy neighbor."

Specific areas of outreach desired and noted in our synodal process include:

- Continued and increasing outreach to the elderly and homebound in our community, including both access to Mass as provided during the pandemic as well as home visitations and continuing faith formation
- Increased emphasis on social justice initiatives: including racial issues, sexual abuse, environment concerns, and reaching our disenfranchised community members
- Reinstating ministry to divorced, separated and widowed members of the parish and community
- Reinstating Faith and Justice parish group, a faith formation program which formerly provided speakers, voter registration, documentaries

It appears that the parish is doing an effective job communicating existing service opportunities. Both online and listening session respondents would like to see increased opportunities for collaborative, multi-age service inside the parish and in the local community.

73% of parishioners responding to our online listening survey said that they were **aware of community service opportunities** offered by the parish.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

We need more volunteer opportunities that everyone can take part in – **break out from age groups** … more social justice … personal outreach

> Need more connection between church and school. Important for students to see how faith relates to other parts of their life. **Prioritize bringing the community together**: Cana couples, Deacon dinners, pancake breakfasts, In-N-Out truck, home masses, fish fries, **having priests and church part of school service opportunities and vice versa**. Opportunities available and details known for kids: altar serving, youth group, children's ministry, grade masses and dinners.

Focus on social justice: sandwich builders, Ukraine fundraiser, carriers over to the school – **creates a setting of prayer that is empowering for young children and allows children to connect faith to their lives**.

With a general call for the laity to be more involved in parish and Church leadership, SPA may want to challenge and form laity of all ages to become active, intergenerational advocates for a parish life that actively prioritizes local and global service as a hallmark of our community.

What does love look like?
It has the hands to help others.
It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy.
It has eyes to see the misery and want.
It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men.
That is what love looks like.

St. Augustine



SANDWICH BUILDERS MINISTRY

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
OUR COMMUNITY

SEASON OF ADVENT, SESSION 2

PRAYER BEFORE FAITH SHARING

We bless you Lord for our calling, for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart. A heart that rejoices in your coming, a heart sustained by your Spirit, a heart encouraged by fellow disciples.

May there grow in each of our hearts the disciple's willingness to learn, and the disciple's joy in becoming a medium of your grace. **AMEN**

From "Prayers for Parish Groups," Harrington and Kavanagh

'WELCOMING' AND **'BELONGING'** ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS

1. Do you feel like you "belong" to St. Paul the Apostle parish or do you feel like you "attend" St. Paul the Apostle parish? What is the difference for you?

2. If you were to join St. Paul's right now and you knew no one, what would help you feel like you were a valued part of the community?

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE **MASS**

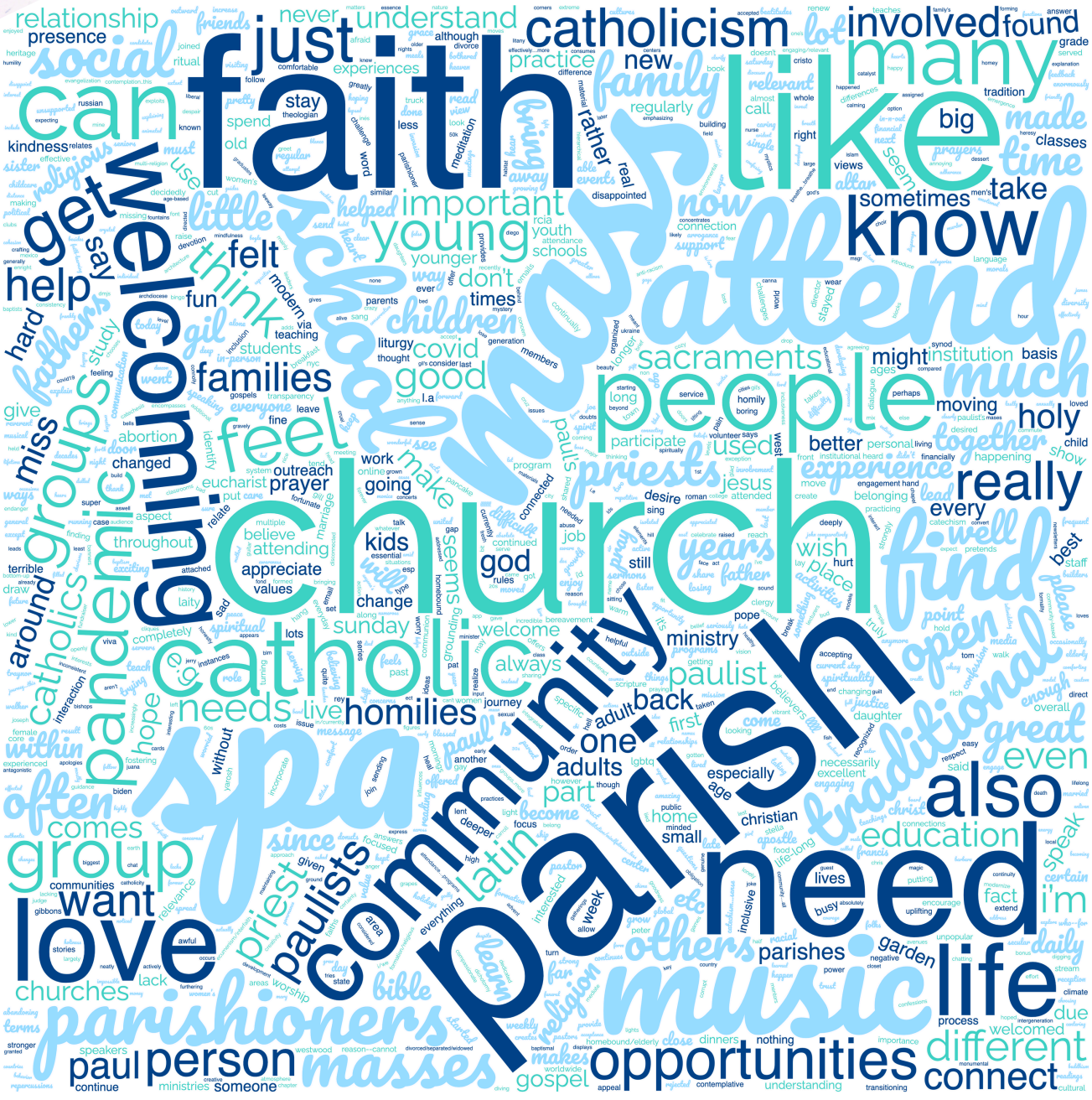
1. The Mass is sometimes called a sacrifice, sometimes a liturgy, sometimes a celebration, sometimes a ritual, sometimes an obligation, and sometimes the public prayer of the people. The Mass is mystical, and it is practical. What is it about the Mass that most speaks to your soul?

2. For many, attending Mass makes us feel peaceful and good. But we are also called to feel empowered for mission by participating in the Mass. Do you feel that empowerment? If so, what does it empower you to do? If not, why do you think you do not feel a sense of empowerment?

FAITH FORMATION

1. In the past year or two, has your faith in the Catholic Church deepened, been challenged, or remained the same? Why is that?

2. Participants in both our our listening sessions and our survey said that they love the Catholic faith but do not feel like they know it very well. They want to have the opportunity to grow in their knowledge of it. How do you feel about your own understanding of Catholicism?



GENERATED WORD CLOUD FROM COMMENTS RELATING TO ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY





MOSAIC OF THE APOSTLES AT THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE CHURCH

DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Judge the Catholic Church not by those who barely live by its spirit, but by the example of those who live closest to it.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

KEY TAKEAWAYS
DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH



Many traditional moral teachings must be reevaluated

Full inclusion of women and the LGBTQ community into the life and leadership of the Church





Lay leadership needed at all levels of Church governance

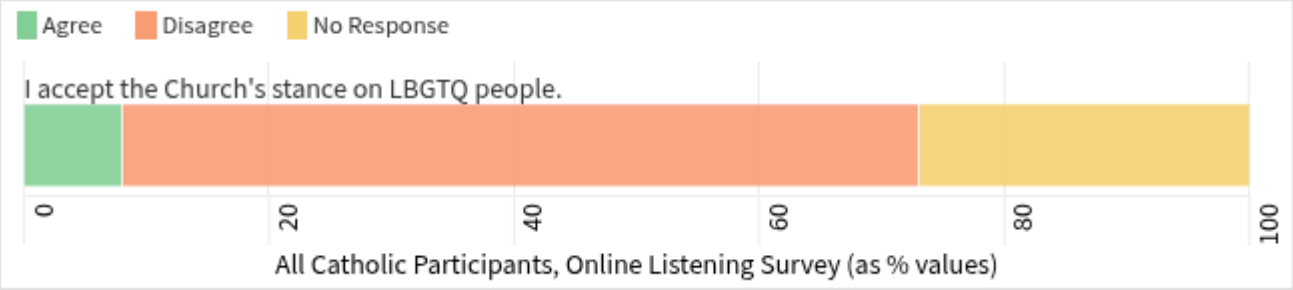
DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

In both our in-person listening sessions and online listening survey, we heard a solid majority of participants reflect on their challenges with particular Church teachings and attitudes. The six main issues which garnered significant conversation were: 1) LGBTQ inclusion; 2) the exclusion of women from Church leadership and ordination; 3) opportunities for lay leadership; 4) teachings on divorce; 5) contraception; 6) abortion; and 7) the lingering effects of the sex abuse scandal.

STORIES OF FAITH

"**Although I love being Catholic**, I attend an Episcopal Church and am active there. **I just can't worship** in a church that does not ordain women or honors my friends and family members who are gay. I don't tolerate sexism and homophobia in any institution of which I am a member, and I won't be part of a church that practices sexism or homophobia."

LGBTQ ROLES IN THE CHURCH



A clear majority of participants in our synodal process noted the harm that is resulting from the institutional Church's stance and words against the LGBTQ community. Participants noted a disconnect between Church teaching and current science. The Church needs to "push away" from harsh words and actions towards the LGBTQ community and be a Church that is willing to journey with each of its members, embracing everyone's journey of faith as unique and sacred.

SACRED SPACE FOR LGBTQ PEOPLE OF FAITH

"LGBTQ : God made **an endless array** of individual people. Please let the Church quit trying to make any one of God's precious children believe they are not fully accepted and loved as God made them. That they must suffer and/or deserve less in life because of who they are. **God Is Love. Our actions as a Church do not always carry out that belief**."

"I still don't understand how i**f we are made in God's image and likeness**, and a person's sexuality is a part of their biological structure at birth, the Church still condemns same sex couples. I don't understand how homosexuality is considered a choice; do YOU choose to be heterosexual? If the Church still believes in heterosexuality as the only true romantic relationships, **what are we supposed to do** with all the people who aren't attracted to the opposite sex?"

"**Some of these doctrines need to be addressed** on the basis of current valid, reliable and reputable research and **science**. The teaching on homosexuality and the treatment of these fellow Catholics are abominable and not based on current neuroscience. As a person of science, I find Benedict XVI's statement that these brothers and sisters in Christ are "intrinsically disordered" quite ignorant and uncharitable"

"**I am heartsick** that the Church does not welcome all people, especially the LGBTQ community"

STORIES OF FAITH

"**As the parent of LGBTQ children** and the president of a support group for LGBTQ persons and their families, I have **experienced the incredible damage done by the church's position on LGBTQ issues**. As in the time of Galileo, the church refuses to consider the scientific research into the origins both of sexual orientation and gender identity. The church's position has caused physical violence and abandonment by parents and depression, despair and suicide on the part of LGBTQ people themselves. It is unconscionable."

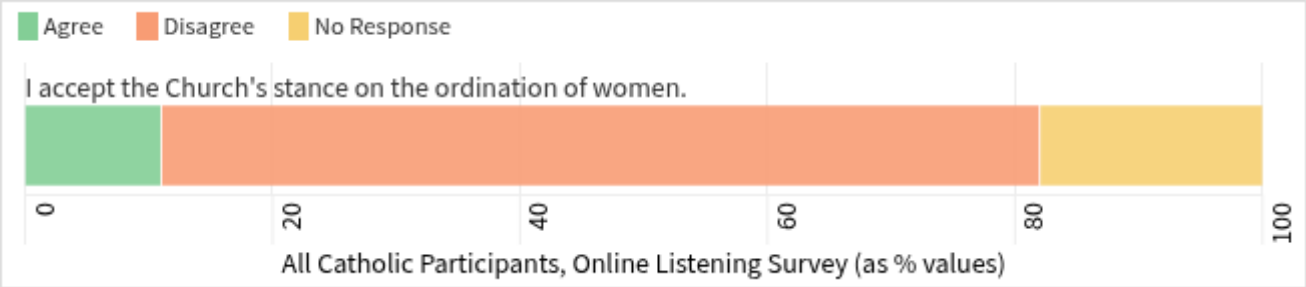
STORIES OF FAITH

"I'm not seriously religious, but because I attend a Catholic school, I'm forced to spend a lot of my time thinking about religion. **I find it difficult to feel welcomed by the Church as someone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ community**. Still, I have found my own connection with a greater power that may or may not be God."

STORIES OF FAITH

"As a gay person, **I have not felt welcomed** in the Church for most of my life. **I have only recently started attending Catholic services** because of the Paulist Fathers at this welcoming church (St. Paul the Apostle)."

WOMEN AND **ORDINATION**



A clear majority of participants in our listening surveys and in-person sessions expressed the desire to include women in the ordained Church ministries of deacons and priests. The continued exclusion of women who have gifts and talents to offer their faith communities through preaching, the celebration of sacraments and other forms of pastoral care is a source of growing frustration for both active and non-practicing Catholics.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

"Need to open **priesthood** to women, or at least **allow them to serve in important roles** as they did in the early church. Women are expected to be the "worker bees" but without the pay or credit."

"**More real leadership opportunities for women**...eventually priesthood"

"Would like to see **the issue of women priests addressed** in our lifetime, if possible. It is needed due to the decreasing number of priests and religious."

"**Women are the bulk of those actually in the pews** (...) Need concrete opportunities. Diaconate for women a necessary step as soon as possible (...) hopefully eventually priesthood."

"**How can women fully participate** in a faith that **excludes** them from leadership?"

According to the Vatican document of 1976, "*Inter Insigniores*," the priest is the image, sign, and representation of Christ before God, and therefore, a man must fill that role because Jesus was male. This interpretation is challenged by scholars such as theologian Elizabeth Johnson, who writes:

> Let it be plainly stated that **women are icons of Christ, imago Christi, in every essential way**. There is a **natural resemblance** between women and Jesus Christ in terms of a **common humanity and participation in divine grace**.
>
> Elizabeth A. Johnson, Commonweal Magazine (1996)

Though some acknowledged that globally, one overall rule about female priests might be difficult to introduce into a number of societies, they also noted that the church needs more priests in general.



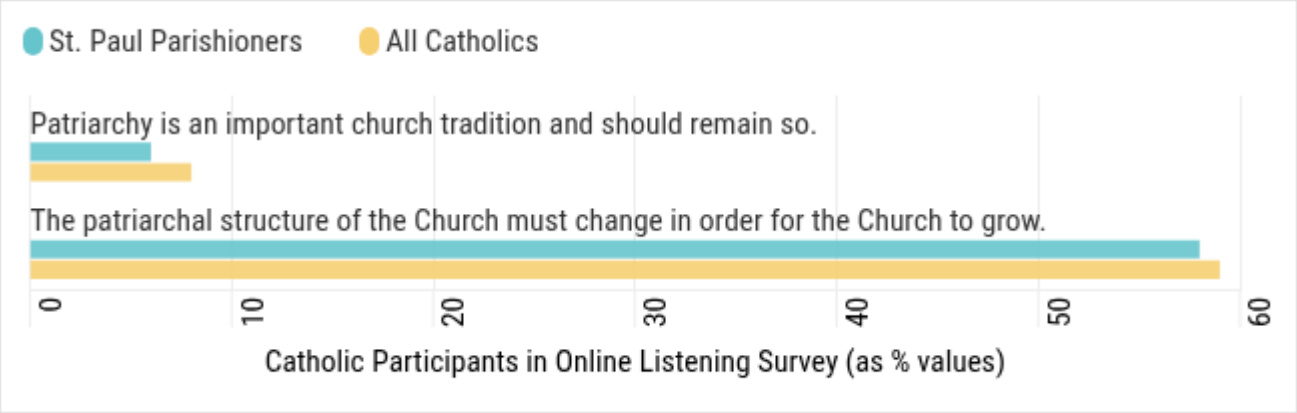
TAPESTRIES FROM OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS CATHEDRAL, LOS ANGELES



AT ONE OF OUR IN-PERSON LISTENING SESSIONS

LAITY

Many participants in our synodal process expressed a desire to see an increased role of the laity in our Church. Participants noted the patriarchal structure of the Church as a point of conversation. We heard both measured critique and anger from a number of our participants.



Some of our Synod participants were lay women and men in professional leadership ministries as Church employees (e.g., educators at all levels, parish ministry leaders, chaplains, etc.). They spoke from their experience and noted **(1)** a need to be able to speak more freely, **(2)** a request for leadership to respond to the real issues facing people who work in a Catholic setting (just wages, better health care, maternity leave), **(3)** a desire for the hierarchy to display increased acceptance of the role of lay people in Church ministry.

After our synodal process, Pope Francis made an unprecedented move that reconfigures some of the Church's hierarchical structure, opening many offices of the Roman Curia (the governing body of the universal Church) to lay leadership.

> [Pope Francis] **has opened almost all Vatican offices to lay leadership**, including heads of dicasteries (formerly called congregations). This means that even the Dicastery for Bishops, which recommends candidates for the episcopacy around the world, can now be headed by a nun. The head of the Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith could be a woman theologian. **Even the secretary of state**, the highest Vatican official under the pope, **could be a layperson**.
>
> Fr. Thomas Reese, SJ, America *online*, July 15, 2022

In the area of lay involvement, this may not be enough progress for some, but Fr. Reese seems to suggest that Pope Francis has made a start by opening up the sphere of leadership surrounding him in order to allow the wisdom and skills of the laity to flow in. *Might the pope be acting in imitation of Jesus, who, at the Last Supper, after kneeling in service to wash his disciples' feet, invited them to help advance his mission? Might he be calling on his brother bishops and pastors to do likewise?*

I have given you a model to follow,
so that as I have done for you,
you should also do.
John 15:9

More importantly, perhaps Pope Francis' action is also an invitation to all of us to answer the call articulated by our Synod participants – to be those "lay people [that] need to be involved" – and step up to the kind of personal involvement that will bring new vigor and a spirit of renewal to our own parish.

THE LAITY

"**More diverse representation** in the universal church. Allow people to speak more freely."

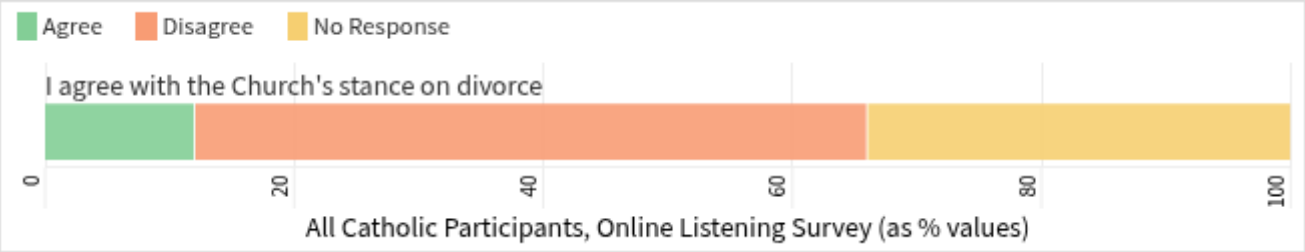
"**More responsive to the economic issues** that people working in a Catholic setting face. Pay higher salaries, better health care. Provide maternity leave."

"I would want to speak [to the Pope] about... **the role of lay ministers** (both professional and volunteer -- and mostly women) in Church leadership -- both at the highest level (Vatican and national) and the local level. ***What can be done*** *to jumpstart the acceptance by bishops and pastors of the legitimacy of these roles?*"

"A **greater role** for the laity"

"Clergy vs. Lay people: **Lay people need to be involved**"

DIVORCE



The "situation of divorced Catholics" was a prominent concern in our synodal process.

ON DIVORCE

"The fact that you **can't receive communion** after divorce is keeping people away from the church"

"**Why can't we support** people who divorce like we support someone who has died?"

"If you are divorced you were made to **not feel welcome**"

As the Synod Committee reviewed these comments, a concern arose regarding the understanding of current Church teaching and practice on the inclusion of divorced persons in the liturgy and sacraments. The specific concern is the number of comments that express an understanding that a divorced Catholic cannot receive the Eucharist or fully practice their faith. It is not clear how many participants in our synodal process meant to indicate "divorced" or "divorced and remarried," but the distinction matters, as in the eyes of the Church, divorce does not prevent participation in Catholic sacramental life. This is a life moment when the support of the faith community and participation in the Eucharistic feast can offer needed comfort and consolation.

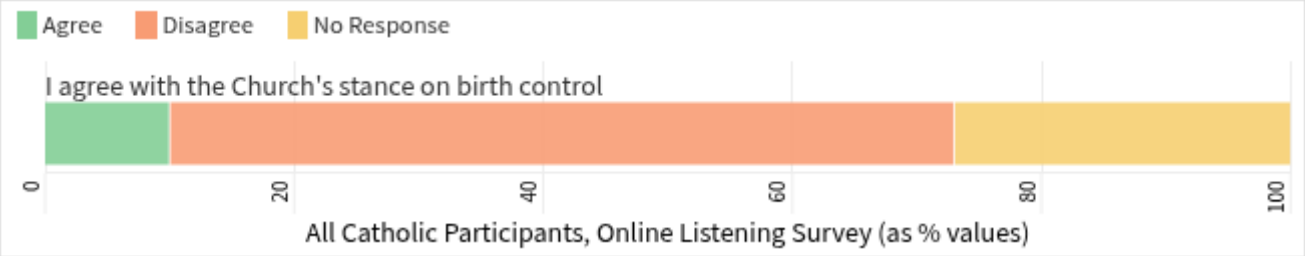
STORIES OF FAITH

"I **really want to remain** in the church and be catholic, but feel also abandoned by the church as I cannot get remarried in the church until my partner has his marriage annulled. **This process has been very painful** and feels a bit archaic"

STORIES OF FAITH

"I was married young and then divorced at 28. **I haven't been to mass since**. I have married outside the church and have 2 children. I **often want to go back to church** but the marriage annulment process seems daunting"

CONTRACEPTION



In July of 1968, Pope Paul VI promulgated the encyclical, *Humanae vitae*. Subtitled *On the Regulation of Birth*, it reaffirmed the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding married love, responsible parenthood, and the rejection of artificial contraception.

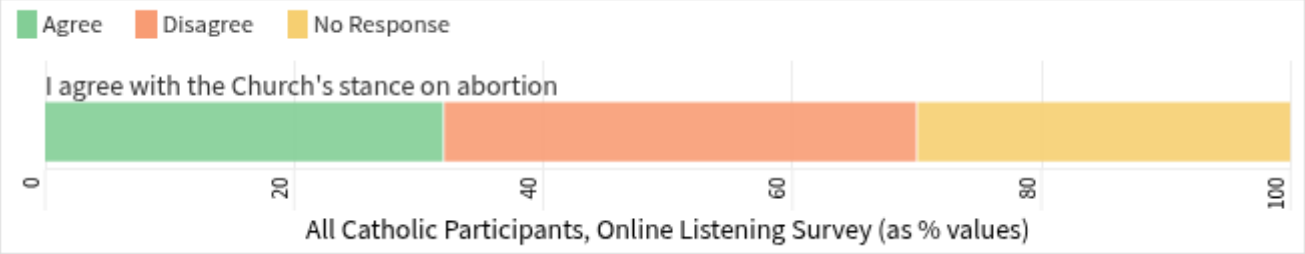
From the onset, *Humanae vitae* has been a controversial encyclical, and many Catholics have ignored its prohibition regarding contraception. The Catholic Church supports the methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP). On the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, NFP is explained thus:

"Natural Family Planning is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid conception. These methods are based on the observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle...No drugs, devices, or surgical procedures are used to avoid pregnancy."

STORIES OF FAITH

I practiced natural family planning in my own marriage with great success. But it is ridiculous not to support other forms of birth control. We are not a faith that eschews all medical interventions... We understand that physical intimacy has **an important purpose in the bonding** of married couples beyond that of creating life. And finally, prevention of unplanned pregnancy is the greatest thing we can do to prevent abortions. Not starting a new life is infinitely better than ending one.

ABORTION



Ultimately, abortion takes place because there is **something wrong within the culture,** within the system, and **not simply** because this or that particular woman is seeking to end an unwanted pregnancy.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser
The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality

Few things divide us as emotionally and decisively as does the issue of abortion. It is perhaps the loudest and most contentious subject on the American political landscape, as well as in the Church. Our synodal process took place previous to the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which nullified the constitutional right to an abortion. It is doubtful that deeply held convictions such as these were changed by a change in the law. The comments we heard on this subject in our synodal process were as wide ranging and passionate as they are in society in general.

"It's sad that **our parish is completely silent** about the death of the unborn! You would never know where the Catholic Church stands on the issue of abortion. What St. Paul the Apostle doesn't say is just as powerful as what it does say."

"Give people the opportunity to **follow their hearts** and own beliefs on abortion."

"I believe that dissent is a serious matter. **I dissent only after deep study and praye**r. I am **pro-life**, but for the Church to have any credibility it must stop putting up little white crosses and **start supporting mothers and the poor**."

"I'm not sure if I believe abortion is murder or not. However, I do believe that God gave women the right to choose by virtue of giving them **free will and a conscience by which to be guided** and make moral choices."

No matter our differences, perhaps we can agree that women with unwanted pregnancies have a need for community and accompaniment. Whether or not a parishioner opposes or supports abortion, we hope that we can find middle ground from which a ministry of healing might emerge.

THE **SEXUAL ABUSE SCANDAL**

Despite the reforms instituted by the American Catholic Church to prevent the reoccurrence of child sexual abuse, at least a third of all participants in our synodal process indicate that their relationship with the Institutional Church is still harmed.

35% of participants responding to our online listening survey said that the **sexual abuse scandal makes them question** their association with the Catholic Church.

TOWARDS A MORE **HONEST** CHURCH



"I have had to remind myself that **the Church is made of humans and humans sin**. But **I continued to be troubled** by the Church leadership's reaction to scandals and the victims of abuse. There is still much to be done to atone for past sins and abuse."

"Sex Abuse - **raise up leadership in local church**. Ongoing pain. **Caused a wedge** between church and young people, sense of shame and sorrow."

"It is difficult to defend my faith when **so many bad things** have happened at the hands of the priests. We make a lot of effort to take precautions -- *VIRTUS*, fingerprinting, etc -- that stems from things that priests did to parishioners. It seems ridiculous. "



STORIES OF FAITH

"We **used to participate regularly** in church prior to the sexual abuse scandal and the **lack of clear love** and acceptance of the LGBTQ community by the church at large. The **hypocrisy of the institution** really destroyed my lifelong association with the Catholic Church. I now just **try to live a moral and ethical life**, trying to have love for every living person no matter their race, sexual orientation etc. I still look to this pope with hope and admiration as I do with some of our local parish leadership but the **institution has been permanently harmed** in my eyes.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FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH
SEASON OF LENT, SESSION 1

PRAYER BEFORE FAITH SHARING

We bless you Lord for our calling, for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart. A heart that rejoices in your coming, a heart sustained by your Spirit, a heart encouraged by fellow disciples.

May there grow in each of our hearts the disciple's willingness to learn, and the disciple's joy in becoming a medium of your grace. **AMEN**

From "Prayers for Parish Groups," Harrington and Kavanagh

1.What struck you the most after reading the Chapter on the Universal Church in the Synod Report?

2. Many Catholics are still reeling from the effects of the sexual abuse scandal in the Church. How has your personal sense of Catholic identity been affected by it?

3.A number of Synod participants indicated that many of the moral teachings of the Church need to be reevaluated. Do you believe that the Spirit is calling us as a Church to make changes, or do you think change to long held doctrine or teachings is unwise?

4.As the Universal Church grapples with the issues of LGBTQ acceptance, women's ordination, the role of the laity, divorce, contraception, abortion, and the sexual abuse scandal, are there any steps towards healing and acceptance that you might personally take in one of these areas?

5.The Catholic Church is large and far-reaching. It is easy to think of it as an institution with which we are associated, but not for which we are responsible. If, as Vatican II told us, we are the Church, how do you reconcile within yourself any differences you have with the Church?

6.What keeps you Catholic?



LISTENING TO THE DISAFFILIATED

"I no longer identify as Catholic"



KEY TAKEAWAYS
LISTENING TO THE DISAFFILIATED



Spiritually searching, but no longer open to traditions and practices of the Church

Spirituality involves individual experiences as opposed to interpersonal or communal practices.





For some, the Catholic Church as an institution is too flawed and damaged to be credible.

Through our online listening survey, our synodal process was able to reach out to those disaffiliated from Catholicism, as well as non-Catholics. 60 participants in our synodal process identified in this category. We thank them for their participation in our synodal process.

We tried to create space to listen to their stories. Some shared deep hurts caused by a Church whose theology is unable to meet the reality of their lived experience. The sexual abuse scandal, the Church's stance on LGBTQ issues, and the need for the voice of women in leadership positions were highlighted. Others reflected on how Catholicism provided an initial framework for their core values, even though participating in the life of the institutional Church no longer resonates with them.

More than half of those who identified as no longer Catholic in our listening survey are under the age of 40.
42% of participants (n=25) identified as under the age of 40.
20% of participants (n=12) identified as under the age of 25.

These stories are important for us to hold in our hearts, for us to ponder and reflect on. *How can we as Church better listen to, encounter, and accompany those who have real institutional differences with us?*

A third of those who identified in this category indicated having a spiritual-but-not-religious framework. They continue to be spiritual seekers, looking to traditions and practices outside the Church.

"I try to cultivate **the sense of being part of the Universe**, less centered on myself. "

"I have been **exploring Buddhist meditation practices** for about seven years and found **great spiritual and intellectual benefit** from it. The concept of '**basic goodness**' coincides with my personal belief in God."

"I **practice gratitude** daily."

A LISTENING HEART

"I am a practicing Episcopalian. I still attend mass with my mom. She is disappointed that I attend Episcopal church, not Catholic. **I find the Episcopal Church so much more inviting**. As they say, all baptized Christians are welcome at the altar, and everyone is welcome in the church (divorced, LGBTQ)."

"I truly **do not miss anything**. I'm sorry to say it, but I believe the Church is corrupt."

"Live the teachings of Jesus. **The church is far from that**."

"I think that for whatever reason I am a **happier** person now that I **no longer identify as Catholic.**"

"The Church **needs to be accountable** for ALL the abuse and corruption it has engaged in and has allowed to continue in the name of God. **The whole institution has to transform** into what Jesus' teachings really communicated. Jesus' teachings were not based on fear, punishment, and obedience. Jesus' teachings were based on love and acceptance. They would see **all people as made in God's image** perfect as they were created by God and living their authentic selves regardless of their gender, and for all people to have an opportunity to serve equally in all roles the church and ministry without the requirement to be unwed. I would also l**ike the church to elevate the role of wome**n as they have been minimized by scripture and the church."

A LISTENING HEART

"I went through 12 years of Catholic schooling. I had all the sacraments that school aged children have, went to church on Sundays, etc. **As I grew older, I couldn't understand how a message of love grew into something so toxic**. The Church claims to live out the message of Jesus, but it does the exact opposite.

Jesus loved all people - those with diseases, social outcasts etc., yet the church shuns the LGBTQA community.

Jesus treated all people as equals, yet the church doesn't allow women to be priests.

Jesus gave to the poor, yet the church hoards money. Jesus had a message of love and kindness, yet the church protected the criminal abusers and pedophiles who were priests.

Jesus spoke about respecting God's creation, but the church does nothing in the effort to fight the climate crisis.

I feel that **the message has been lost** entirely to an industry that ultimately cares only for their own self interest. I'm **stunned by the hypocrisy** both from the top levels down to the practices at St. Paul's. It's such a turn off. I married a man who is not religious and we have chosen not to have our children baptized. I can't choose to raise them in a religion that doesn't align with my core values, which ultimately are simply to embody kindness. How sad that the Catholic church **does not reflect love and kindness.**"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS
LISTENING TO THE DISAFFILIATED
SEASON OF LENT, SESSION 2

PRAYER BEFORE FAITH SHARING

We bless you Lord for our calling, for nurturing in each of us a disciple's heart. A heart that rejoices in your coming, a heart sustained by your Spirit, a heart encouraged by fellow disciples.

May there grow in each of our hearts the disciple's willingness to learn, and the disciple's joy in becoming a medium of your grace. **AMEN**

From "Prayers for Parish Groups," Harrington and Kavanagh

1. What stuck you most as you read the Chapter on Listening to the Disaffiliated?

2. During your life, have you ever left the Church and returned? If so, what was the reason for your return?

3. How comfortable are you talking with disaffiliated family members and friends about your faith? Do you stay silent? Do you cajole? Do you pressure? Is there a strain in your relationships because of it?

4. Many who have left the Church consider themselves spiritual but not religious. What is it about Catholicism that holds you and makes you regret what others are missing?

5. Do you believe that God is at work in you? Do you believe that God is at work in your loved ones who have left the Church?

6. How has your Lent been affected by participating in this process?

LUNCH WITH POPE FRANCIS

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the **ability to heal wounds** and to **warm the hearts of the faithful**; it needs **nearness**, **proximity**.

Pope Francis



Photo by Ashwin Vaswani on Unsplash

At the end of our online listening survey, we invited participants to comment on what they would talk about if they were to have lunch with Pope Francis. The responses we received were remarkably heartfelt, ranging from light and whimsical to deeply personal. Most of our responses expressed an appreciation for Pope Francis' pontificate. Of over 400 responses, 11 expressed unfavorable opinions of the Pope. These examples speak to the varying topics of conversation proposed by our synod participants.

"I would want to ask him if I am on the right track. Where God wants me to be. "

"The purpose of life."

"What it means to be Catholic."

"I would just listen to ALL his advice on how to live a peaceful and meaningful life."

"How to listen to God."

"Can we really be forgiven by Jesus as I am a real sinner?"

"I would ask Pope Francis what his experience is like dealing with the global church. Often I can forget that my experience of being Catholic is part of a universal experience, and I wonder what it's like keeping that in mind as the successor to Saint Peter."

"How does he balance all the worldly demands and pressures of leading the Church with his personal relationship and prayer with God? His humility and desire for simplicity amidst such politics and traditional opulence and grandeur?"

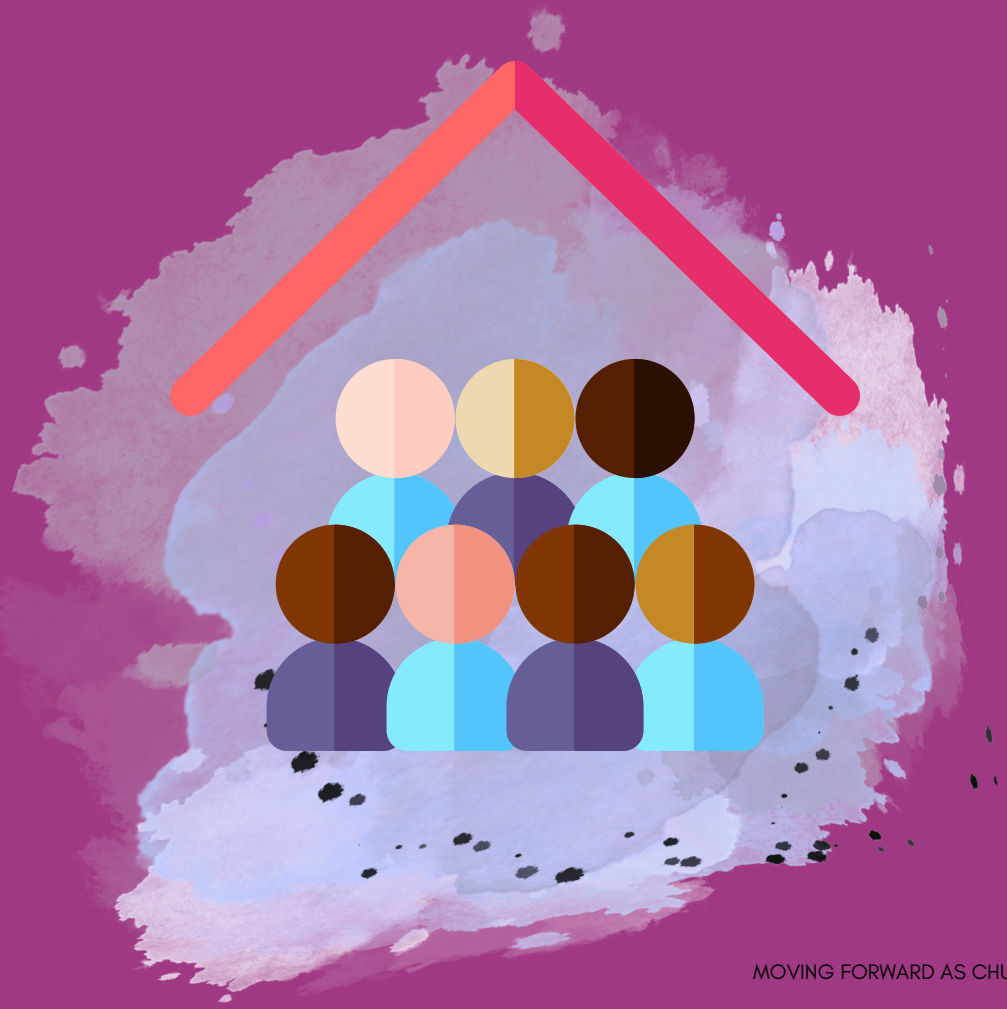
"How specifically to become closer to God and bring more of the Holy Spirit into our lives."

"To hear about his life, his upbringing. If he's happy. To know him."

"How to deal with failure."

MOVING FORWARD AS CHURCH

BEING CHURCH *IN THE 21ST CENTURY*



This synodal process has been the first experience for many of a listening Church. The two arms of our synodal process – our in-person listening sessions and online listening survey – gathered a diverse group of people together and created space for us to honestly share of our experiences. In our synodal process, we heard the many joys as well as the many hurts in our local community and the wider Church. In our in-person listening sessions, some parishioners expressed surprise to learn that others felt similarly to them on certain issues.

> (...) In the synodal Church the whole community, **in the free and rich diversity of its members**, is **called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice** on taking pastoral decisions which **correspond as closely as possible to God's will** (...)
>
> International Theological Commission
> *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church (2018)*, no. 68

The invitation of Pope Francis for us to be a more synodal Church is a radically new way of being Church. As a local community and as a wider Church, we often fall short in our commitment to see each other as fellow pilgrims on the same journey of life – the same journey of faith. Our participation in the wider Church's synodal process is one step towards recommitting our local community, St. Paul the Apostle Community, to a style of mission where each member of our parish is seen as someone who has something valuable to share in building up our church. Cardinal Robert McElroy of the Diocese of San Diego puts it well:

> ***Can synodality become a deeper element of Catholic life in the United States***? Our current process may prove this to be so. One of the central sentiments expressed in our diocesan synodal consultations has been **that the people of God have at times not been meaningfully heard** and responded to in the institutional life of the church, and they fear that the synodal process might be another in a series of moments when hopes are raised only to be frustrated. But the **current synod process offers a glimpse of a Church yet to come.** Hundreds of thousands of Catholics have engaged with the Church on their joys, their sorrows and their hopes for what the Church can be today and tomorrow...

It will take time for us as a community to continue to process and reflect what we've learned about each other and about our Church through our first synodal process. The invitation, as we move forward as one community, is to discern how the Holy Spirit might be inviting us to be church in a new way. *How might we bring about new vigor to St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community? To the wider Church?* At the onset of our parish synodal process, the St. Paul's Synod Committee promised to report back to our faith community and all participants about what we learned from them. This report actualizes that commitment and is presented in a format that encourages follow up conversation. This is not the end of listening to each other, but only the beginning. As the larger synodal process takes place in the wider Church, we will be sure to reflect on what we hear from other faith communities as well. We commit to building an ongoing culture of synodality at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community. **We dare now to realize this new style of being Church.**

> **The People of God journeys through history in order to share with all the leaven, the salt, the light of the Gospel**. That is why "evangelisation also involves the path of dialogue" (..._ Initiatives involving **encounter, dialogue and co-operation win credence** as precious **stages on our common pilgrimage** and the **synodal journey of the People of God** shows itself to be a school of life where we acquire the ethos needed to **practise dialogue with all** – without irenicism or compromise.
>
> In fact today, when **growing awareness of the interdependence between peoples** forces us to think of the world as our **common home**, the Church is called to demonstrate that her Catholicity and the synodal way in which she lives and works are **a catalyst of unity in diversity and of communion in freedom**. This is a significant contribution that the life and synodal conversion of the People of God can make to **the promotion of a culture of encounter and solidarity, respect and dialogue, inclusion and integration, gratitude and gift**.
>
> International Theological Commission
> *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church (2018)*, no. 118

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
MOVING FORWARD AS CHURCH

BELIEF & FAITH PRACTICES

1. What is one thing that you can do to enhance the identity and mission of the Church?

2. What is one thing that this community can do to enhance the identity and mission of the Church?

OUR COMMUNITY

Welcome and Belonging

1. In what ways in the past have you come to know other people in the parish?

2. What would you be willing to participate in that you believe would help the parish become a closer community?

Church and School

1. What causes, passions, beliefs do the school community and the worshipping community have in common?

2. In what ways might the worshipping community reach out to support the school community?

3. In what ways might the school community reach out to support the worshiping community?

Young Adults

1. Many young adults desire a Church that is increasingly open and inclusive. What areas of parish life and mission might our community focus on that would make it more open and inclusive?

Faith Formation

Our online listening survey and in-person listening sessions both surfaced a need among current adult parishioners for more adult faith formation. What do you think the parish needs, e.g.: more instruction on Church teachings, more opportunities to discuss Church teachings, more opportunities for bible study and faith sharing, or something else? What would you want to participate in if it was offered on Zoom or in-person?

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
MOVING FORWARD AS CHURCH

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

1. What steps might we take together as a faith community to welcome and support:
a.LGBTQ adults, teens and children
b.The visibility of women in leadership roles at St. Paul's
c.The engagement of the laity in parish life
d.The divorced

LISTENING TO THE DISAFFILIATED

1. How might this faith community reach out in ways that would attract those who have left the Church?

"Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with love."

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

"I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."

St. Teresa of Calcutta
(Mother Teresa)

APPENDIX

IN-PERSON LISTENING SESSIONS (4 sessions, n = 131 participants)
average length - 2 hours

ONLINE LISTENING SURVEY (n = 461 participants)
average time to complete - 35 minutes

OVERALL DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

AGE

14 - 17	46	**56 - 74**	226
18 - 25	24	**75+**	115
26 - 39	62	**No Response**	12
40 - 55	107		

GENDER

Female	395
Male	160
Non-Binary	1
No Response	36

ETHNICITY

Asian	50	**Black / African-American**	8
Caucasian	434	**Hispanic / Latino**	87
Native American	7	**Other**	8

IN-PERSON LISTENING SESSION DISCUSSION SECTIONS

Discussion A: "Our Journey Together Now"

- How have we "journeyed together" as a Church in recent years?
- Please give concrete examples of fruitful experiences, as well as examples of what has hindered our journeying together.
- We invite you to share positive experiences and bring to light challenging and negative experiences.

Discussion B: "Journeying Together in the Future"

- How might the Holy Spirit be inviting our Church to "journey together" more fully in the coming years?
- What are your hopes for the Church to live in deeper unity, to promote participation, and to proclaim the Gospel?
- Please give concrete examples.
- As you think of possibilities, perhaps pay attention to the ideas that give you clarity, enthusiasm, peace, and hope (these may be an indication of the promptings of the Spirit)

ONLINE LISTENING SURVEY DESIGN

OPENING PAGE

We want to hear from you. Practicing Catholics. Cultural Catholics. Former Catholics. And everybody in between.

The Church really needs to hear your voice. Your story has power to break down barriers. Individual responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Thank You!

Q1. Please select the choice that best describes you.

- I consider myself a Catholic.
- I am no longer a Catholic.

"I consider myself Catholic"

Q2a. How do you currently self-identify?

A Christian
B Spiritual but not Religious
C Practicing Catholic
D Agnostic
E Catholic but non-practicing
F Mindfulness Practice
G Also affiliated with a religion other than Roman Catholicism
H Cultural Catholic, it's part of my heritage
I My spouse/partner is Catholic
J Baptized in another faith but attend Catholic services
K Minimally Catholic
L Other (type in)

Q2b. What is your experience of being Catholic?

A I take my Catholic faith very seriously.
B Being affiliated with a religion does not necessarily make you religious or spiritual.
C I do not go to Mass, but I'm Catholic in my heart and actions.
D When I'm with my family I go to Church to please them.
E I will attend Mass, but the institutional Church is no longer relevant to me.
F I have Christian symbols in my home.
G Many of the values I hold in life come from my Catholic upbringing.
H Mass is boring and I don't get much out of it.
I My child/children is/are being raised Catholic.
J I'm just too busy to spend much time thinking about spiritual things.
K I believe in a Divine presence.
L I believe God intervenes in people's lives.
M I believe there is something "more" beyond us that calls to us.
N I believe that God's nature is incomprehensible and limitless.
O I pray/talk to deceased relatives and friends.
P I have a personal relationship with God.
Q I believe that God engages us at our deepest level in dreams, internal "proddings" and through other people.
R I believe that God engages us at our deepest level through scripture and devotional practices.
S Belonging to a parish is an essential aspect of being Catholic for me.
T My spirituality encompasses multiple religious traditions and cultural views.
U I find it hard to practice my Catholic faith when my spouse/partner is not Catholic.
V Attending mass nourishes my spirituality.
W I participate in outreach activities because of my Catholic faith.
X I pray at meals.
Y I'm disappointed that my children are no longer Catholic.

Z I'm disappointed that my grandchildren are not baptized.
A The sexual abuse scandal makes me question my association with the Catholic Church.
AB The Church is the people of God.
AC I have been in / currently in a Bible study group.
AD I have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit.
AE I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
AF I have a personal devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Q2c. Would you like to further articulate anything about your experience of being a Catholic?
(Comment response)

Q2d. What are your thoughts on Catholic doctrine?
A I accept the Church's authority and follow all of the Church's teachings.
B I believe that Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist in a special way.
C Some church doctrines are impossible for me to accept.
D I believe that Catholicism is the only true religion.
E I believe that Jesus was put to death to atone for our sins.
F I believe that Jesus was a dynamic prophet but I'm not sure that he was God.
G I believe that Jesus revealed to humanity the very character of God.
H I believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.
I I agree with the Church's stance on divorce.
J I disagree with the Church's stance on divorce.
K Some Church doctrine is out of step with the times.
L I agree with the Church's stance on the ordination of women.
M I disagree with the Church's stance on the ordination of women.
N I believe that the Bible is not to be taken literally.
O I agree with the Church's stance on LGBTQ people.
P I disagree with the Church's stance on LBGTQ people.
Q I believe that Jesus rose from the dead.
R I agree with the Church's stance on abortion.
S I disagree with the Church's stance on abortion.
T I believe in an afterlife.
U I'm not sure there is an afterlife.
V Patriarchy is an important church tradition and should remain so.
W The patriarchal structure of the Church must change in order for the Church to grow.
X I agree with the Church's stance on birth control.
Y I disagree with the Church's stance on birth control.
Z I believe that the Church is capable of change.
AA I dont' believe in a God who would require God's own Son to suffer and die in order to forgive the human race of its sins.
AB I believe everything we recite in the Creed.
AC I agree with the Church's stance on euthanasia.
AD I disagree with the Church's stance on euthanasia.

Q2e. Would you like to further articulate anything about your thoughts on Catholic doctrine?
(Comment response)

Q2f. Do you belong to St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community (past and present)?
- Yes
- No

Q2g. (If No) - How did you find out about our listening survey?
A I live in the neighborhood.
B A family member or friend of mine handed me a link / QR code to the survey.
C I receive Fr. Gil's weekly email newsletter.
D I belong to another parish.
E Other (type in)

Q2h (If Yes) - What best describes you?
A I am a current parishioner.
B I used to be a parishioner but now belong to another parish.
C I am a graduate of the school.
D Other (type in)

Q2i. Do you presently have a child in the school or in our religious education program?
A Yes, I have a child in the parish school.
B Yes, I have a child in the parish religious education program.
C No, but I hope to send my child to the parish school.
D No, but I hope to send my child to the parish religious education program.
E No

Q2j. What is your experience of St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community?
A The parish gives me tools that support the practice of my faith at home.
B I feel isolated and alone when I attend mass.
C The parish school is my source of connection and community life.
D I am aware of the opportunities for community service offered by the parish.
E I am aware of the opportunities for group prayer and meditation offered by the parish.
F I know the names of all the priests at the parish.
G The parish is a convenient place to attend mass – I don't need it to be anything more.
H I find the homilies help me understand the readings and their significance to my life.
I I don't find the parish to be very welcoming.
J I would like to serve more actively in the parish but I don't know how to get involved.
K I support the parish financially.
L I appreciate how the specific mission of the Paulist Fathers influences this community.
M Music enhances my experience of the mass.
N Music distracts from my experience of the mass.
O I attend mass at St. Paul's.
P I attend mass at different parishes.
Q I find the parish a warm and welcoming place.

Q2k. Would you like to further articulate anything about your experiences at our parish?
(Comment response)

Q2l. If you were having lunch with Pope Francis, what would you want to talk with him about?
(Comment response) —> and then goes to **Q4**

"I am no longer Catholic"
Q3a. How do you currently self-identify?
A Spiritual but not Religious
B Christian
C Ex-Catholic
D Secularist
E Catholic but not practicing
F Agnostic
G Catholic
H I practice Mindfulness
I Affiliated with a religion other than Roman Catholicism
J Cultural Catholic
K Atheist
L I attend Mass only on Christmas and Easter
M My spouse/partner is Catholic
N I have children in Catholic School / I plan to send my children to Catholic School
O I have children in a Religious Education Program / plan to send my children to a Religious Education Program.
P Other (type in)

Q3b. Is there anything you miss about being Catholic?
A Belonging to a community
B Scheduled time to pray and reflect
C Being part of a world care organization
D The security of believing in an afterlife
E I don't miss anything
F Certain rituals
G Receiving the Eucharist
H Being associated with a historical religion
I Having a spiritual path for myself
J Praying with other people
K Social functions
L Homilies that help me grow spiritually
M Going to confession
N A tie to family members
O A spiritual path for my children
P Having something to believe in

Q3c. Would you like to further articulate anything you might miss about being Catholic?
(Comment response)

Q3d. What are you current spiritual practices and beliefs?
A I pray when I'm worried or anxious.
B I don't believe there is anything "out there" to pray to.
C I meditate to center myself.
D I struggle with exploring my spirituality.
E I don't believe in God.
F I believe the universe/creation is dynamic and that a person can tap into that energy.
G I talk/pray to deceased relatives and friends.
H I sometimes sense a transcendent presence.
I I pray/talk to Jesus.
J I pray/talk to God.
K I believe in the Spirit.
L I believe in a Divine presence.
M I don't know if there is a God.

N I believe God is love.
O I believe that God engages us at our deepest levels in dreams, internal "prodding" and through other people.
P I believe that God engages us at our deepest levels through scripture and devotional practices.
Q I believe there is an extra dimension to reality.
R My beliefs about God change all the time.
S I only trust science and what can be proven.
T I find God in nature.
U My spirituality encompasses multiple religious traditions and culture views.
V I do not pray.
W I worry that there is nothing beyond this life.
X If God exists why is the world in such a bad shape?
Y I find myself praying sometimes even though I don't believe.
Z I don't know how to pray.

Q3e. Would you like to further articulate anything about your spirituality practices and beliefs?
(Comment response)

Q3f. What could the Church do to invite you back with a sense of relevance and belonging?
(Comment response)

Q3g. Are you associated with St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community in Los Angeles, CA?
- Yes (Q3h)
- No (Q4)

Q3h. (If YES), How are you associated to St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Community?
A I went to St. Paul the Apostle School.
B My children went to St. Paul the Apostle School.
C I have a friend/acquaintance who goes to St. Paul's.
D I am currently associated with St. Paul's.
E I used to be associated with St. Paul's.
F My children went to Religious Ed at St. Paul's.

-survey merges at this point-
Q4. What is your age?
A Under 18. B 18 - 25. C 26 - 39. . D 40 - 55. E 56 - 74. F 75 +

Q5. With what gender do you self-identify?
(Comment response)

Q6. What is your ethnicity?
A American Indian or Alaskan Native B Asian or Pacific Islander C Black or African American
D Hispanic or Latino. E White / Caucasian. F Prefer not to answer G Other (type in)

Q7. What is your US zip code, or country if outside the United States? (Optional)
Q8. Would you be interested in being part of a group discussion of the findings of this survey?
- Yes
- No

Q9. (If YES) Please leave us your email address so that we can contact you.
Q10. Name (Optional)

ONLINE LISTENING SURVEY AGGREGATE RESPONSES

Experience of Being Catholic

	ALL (n=401)		ST. PAUL'S (n=167)	
	n	%	n	%
I take my Catholic faith very seriously.	233	58.10	101	60.48
Being affiliated with a religion does not necessarily make you religious or spiritual.	127	31.67	50	29.94
I do not go to Mass, but I'm Catholic in my heart and actions.	64	15.96	17	10.18
When I'm with my family I go to Church to please them.	21	5.24	5	2.99
I will attend Mass, but the institutional Church is no longer relevant to me.	83	20.70	24	14.37
I have Christian symbols in my home.	242	60.35	106	63.47
Many of the values I hold in life come from my Catholic upbringing.	273	68.08	109	65.27
Mass is boring and I don't get much out of it.	36	8.98	14	8.38
My child/children is/are being raised Catholic.	106	26.43	59	35.33
I'm just too busy to spend much time thinking about spiritual things.	4	1.00	1	0.60
I believe in a Divine presence.	263	65.59	110	65.87
I believe God intervenes in people's lives.	223	55.61	94	56.29
I believe there is something "more" beyond us that calls to us.	245	61.10	100	59.88
I believe that God's nature is incomprehensible and limitless.	237	59.10	99	59.28
I pray/talk to deceased relatives and friends.	174	43.39	75	44.91
I have a personal relationship with God.	239	59.60	97	58.08
I believe that God engages us at our deepest level in dreams, internal "proddings" and through other people.	193	48.13	77	46.11
I believe that God engages us at our deepest level through scripture and devotional practices.	177	44.14	70	41.92
Belonging to a parish is an essential aspect of being Catholic for me.	178	44.39	91	54.49
My spirituality encompasses multiple religious traditions and cultural views.	87	21.70	34	20.36
I find it hard to practice my Catholic faith when my spouse/partner is not Catholic.	14	3.49	7	4.19
Attending mass nourishes my spirituality.	212	52.87	105	62.87
I participate in outreach activities because of my Catholic faith.	129	32.17	50	29.94
I pray at meals.	173	43.14	67	40.12
I'm disappointed that my children are no longer Catholic.	72	17.96	32	19.16
I'm disappointed that my grandchildren are not baptized.	29	7.23	13	7.78
The sexual abuse scandal makes me question my association with the Catholic Church.	117	29.18	42	25.15
The Church is the people of God.	183	45.64	77	46.11
I have been in / currently in a Bible study group.	119	29.68	40	23.95
I have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit.	150	37.41	55	32.93
I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.	194	48.38	72	43.11
I have a personal devotion to the Blessed Mother.	143	35.66	51	30.54

ONLINE LISTENING SURVEY AGGREGATE RESPONSES

Beliefs / Doctrine Issues

	ALL (n=401)		ST. PAUL'S (n=167)	
	n	%	n	%
I accept the Church's authority and follow all of the Church's teachings.	69	17.21	24	14.37
I believe that the Church is capable of change.	248	61.85	116	69.46
I believe everything we recite in the Creed.	165	41.15	79	47.31
I believe that Catholicism is the only true religion.	44	10.97	11	6.59
I believe that Jesus was put to death to atone for our sins.	220	54.86	105	62.87
I don't believe in a God who would require God's own Son to suffer and die in order to forgive the human race of its sins.	33	8.23	8	4.79
I believe that Jesus was a dynamic prophet but I'm not sure that he was God.	31	7.73	13	7.78
I believe that Jesus revealed to humanity the very character of God.	256	63.84	103	61.68
Some church doctrines are impossible for me to accept.	199	49.63	84	50.30
Some Church doctrine is out of step with the times.	249	62.09	109	65.27
I agree with the Church's stance on divorce.	49	12.22	12	7.19
I disagree with the Church's stance on divorce.	216	53.87	94	56.29
I agree with the Church's stance on the ordination of women.	50	12.47	14	8.38
I disagree with the Church's stance on the ordination of women.	255	63.59	111	66.47
I agree with the Church's stance on LGBTQ people.	51	12.72	14	8.38
I disagree with the Church's stance on LGBTQ people.	226	56.36	97	58.08
I agree with the Church's stance on abortion.	129	32.17	48	28.74
I disagree with the Church's stance on abortion.	153	38.15	68	40.72
Patriarchy is an important church tradition and should remain so.	30	7.48	10	5.99
The patriarchal structure of the Church must change in order for the Church to grow.	237	59.10	96	57.49
I agree with the Church's stance on birth control.	39	9.73	9	5.39
I disagree with the Church's stance on birth control.	252	62.84	111	66.47
I agree with the Church's stance on euthanasia.	125	31.17	44	26.35
I disagree with the Church's stance on euthanasia.	100	24.94	47	28.14
I believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.	15	3.74	7	4.19
I believe that the Bible is not to be taken literally.	196	48.88	76	45.51
I believe that Jesus rose from the dead.	276	68.83	116	69.46
I believe in an afterlife.	299	74.56	125	74.85
I'm not sure there is an afterlife.	54	13.47	20	11.98
I believe that Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist in a special way.	284	70.82	120	71.86

ONLINE LISTENING SURVEY AGGREGATE RESPONSES

Parish-Specific Questions

	ST. PAUL'S (n=167)	
	n	%
I find the parish a warm and welcoming place.	117	70.06
I don't find the parish to be very welcoming.	18	10.78
I feel isolated and alone when I attend mass.	19	11.38
The parish school is my source of connection and community life.	48	28.74
I know the names of all the priests at the parish.	143	85.63
I appreciate how the specific mission of the Paulist Fathers influences this community.	112	67.07
I find the homilies help me understand the readings and their significance to my life.	114	68.26
The parish gives me tools that support the practice of my faith at home.	105	62.87
I support the parish financially.	133	79.64
I attend mass at St. Paul's.	161	96.41
I attend mass at different parishes.	59	35.33
The parish is a convenient place to attend mass - I don't need it to be anything more.	25	14.97
Music enhances my experience of the mass.	150	89.82
Music distracts from my experience of the mass.	9	5.39
I am aware of the opportunities for community service offered by the parish.	122	73.05
I am aware of the opportunities for group prayer and meditation offered by the parish.	107	64.07
I would like to serve more actively in the parish but I don't know how to get involved.	23	13.77

"I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I **pray that he will guide me to do whatever I'm supposed to do**, **what I can do**. I used to pray for answers, but now I'm praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but **now I know that prayer changes us and we change things**."

St. Teresa of Calcutta
(Mother Teresa)



Listening to the heartbeat of today's world

WALKING TOGETHER IN FAITH

for a synodal church

Prayer for the 2021-2023 Synod

Holy Spirit,
we gather together in Your name.

Guide us.
Make Yourself at home in our hearts.
Teach us the way we must follow
and show us how to pursue it.

Although we can be weak and sinful,
help us not to promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance mislead us
nor allow partiality to influence our actions.
Help us to find our unity in You,
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from what is right and true.

We ask this of You,
who are at work in every place and time
in communion with the Father and Son,
forever and ever.

Amen.



synod@sp-apostle.org